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THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE FABIAN
SOCIETY, 1884-1900

by
Stephen J. O'Neil

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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VITA

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CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE LITERATURE AND SUBSTANCE OF FABIAN SOCIALISM

In reviewing the progress of British political and economic activity during the last century, it is impossible to peruse even the most general studies of the era without finding some expanded, and usually favorable, treatment of the Fabian Society. Its membership, we are told, included such notables as Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Lord Olivier, George Bernard Shaw, and H.G. Wells. The Society, still active today, defers largely, however, to the Old Gang--the Fabian patriarchs who founded the group and charted its course from the new awakening of social consciousness in the 1880s through the birth of the Labour Party.

The birth and development of the Fabian Society itself was undramatic in the political context of the times, there being little prospect of financial reward or

political power forthcoming from challenging the existing structure. Fame and position eluded the founders of the Society from the time of their joining until well into the twentieth century. Some of the key Fabian leadership joined forces, in fact, shortly after or during periods of personal or professional failure.¹ The immediate antecedent of the Society, the Fellowship of the New Life, was composed for the most part of individuals wishing to escape from what they perceived as being the harshness and injustice of the cruel '80s to a less pressured and demanding communal life of love, harmony, and contemplation. The more progressive-minded of the Fellowship, unable to sway the majority from their indecisive moral ideals, chose to form a new group which would wait patiently (as did the Roman general Fabius) until the time was right to strike out for the rational organization of mankind (at least in England). Except for labor enthusiasts and Club members, however, the Fabian word rarely went beyond the confines of London between the Society's foundation in 1884 and the publication of their only great collection of writings, the Fabian Essays, in 1889. Their views, to be sure, were not revolutionary, but were, in fact, sympathetic with contemporary Liberalism and Radicalism.²

By reputation and self-proclamation, the Fabians were widely identified as being socialists, a view bolstered in both the popular press and in their own writings. Scholarly opinion, however, defines their thrust as more reformist than socialist in either a Marxist or Utopian sense. Hobsbawm takes this position specifically,³ while McBriar declares the Fabians totally non-revolutionary in all definable aspects and supporters of democracy in outlook.⁴ Pelling, avoiding socialist allusions, carries Edward R. Pease's contention that the Society was constitutional in methods and outlook, noting, however, that by 1900 the Fabians were wavering in their trust of democracy.⁵

Interestingly, both Fabian and non-Fabian historians do not touch upon areas of the Society's organization, the constituency of its membership (with the exception of Hobsbawm, who outlined several categories of the Society's members), the structure of the Society, or the interrelationship of its members. In discussing Fabian doctrine, contributions, policy, reputation, or influence, the commentators have restricted their assessments largely to areas of political influences and specific program developments. If, in fact, the Fabians were, as scholarly opinion

suggests, bureaucrats, middle class Londoners of drawing room persuasions, and generally unimaginative and fallow in the realms of creative political and economic theory, further investigation into these previously explored areas promises marginal, if any, returns. It would seem more productive, therefore, to investigate the structural and organizational aspects of the Society to explain the survival of the Fabians and their long-standing image of, somehow, having lain at the bedrock of modern labor institutions.

Such an investigation may also be useful in analyzing any coordinated effort from the aspect of small group dynamics. While some substantial efforts have been made in this direction,⁶ scant attention has been paid to topics dealing with socialism and the labor movement in England's period of great economic growth and uncertainty during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The current proposal seeks to explore the Fabian Society in its structural and operational forms in an attempt to establish the impact of these elements on the effectiveness and promotability of the group itself. It is also the intent of this work to review actual Fabian influences in light of newly discovered data.

In researching the organization and operation of

the Fabians, one can find a wealth of information compared to the resources generated by the Fabians' socialist contemporaries. The Fabians were prolific publishers and correspondents, and much of their work survives in manuscript and printed forms. In addition, minute books, circulars, broadsides, and manuscript collections are available to supplement many of the gaps in the Fabians' day-to-day operations.⁷ Of the multitude of historical studies on the Fabians, Hobsbawm, Cole, Pease, Pelling, and McBriar, as well as the MacKenzies' more recent work, represent the best and most accessible.⁸ While all are in agreement on the basics of chronology, pedigree, and bibliography, marked differences occur in such areas as the influence of the Society, internal relations, and the question of leadership during the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century. Edward R. Pease, as the Fabian Society's official historian, claimed that there was really no leadership in the sense of dominant personalities.⁹ He does suggest, however, that Sidney Webb was a very influential member of the Society.¹⁰ This is supported by correspondence in the Fabian Archives which suggests that Pease and Webb communicated up to several times a day in urgent matters of Society

business.¹¹ Margaret Cole, literary heir to Pease, wife of G.D.H., and until recently an officer of the present Society, insists that the Fabians were completely "democratic";¹² similarly, she adds that the group had no single leader.¹³ Eric Hobsbawm, no friend of either Pease or Cole, narrows the Society's leadership to Sidney Olivier, George Bernard Shaw, Graham Wallas, and Sidney Webb.¹⁴ McBriar, concerned by his own admission with doctrine versus history, cited Shaw and the Webbs (Sidney and Beatrice) as the real spokespersons of the Society, with Pease offered as an afterthought.¹⁵

These views are at odds with declared Fabian policy which was officially considered to be eclectic and undefined;¹⁶ nevertheless such policy has been described and interpreted monolithically in both official and scholarly accounts of the Society, and is thought of as having been generated without internal conflict or dissent.¹⁷ It appears as though extraordinary control, however, prevented internal conflicts from compromising the unified public face of the Society or otherwise denigrating projects initiated or endorsed by the Fabian leadership. This was accomplished specifically through the close supervision of important committee work by the Society's Executive leadership, the screening of all new

applicants for membership, and the control of all agendas. These various techniques are explained in some detail in the following chapters.

Recognition of such maneuvering, however, was rare. Pease, a master bureaucrat, reminisced after the turn of the century that the policy of the founding Fabian fathers (the "Old Gang") was to make people think that Fabian policy was all things to all people.¹⁸ This approach, according to Pease, was the foundation of Fabian appeal and was never challenged internally except in one unsuccessful instance.¹⁹ Hobsbawm, in an effort to define Fabian policy precisely, traced their efforts to two components: a tactic (permeation); and a program, the basis of which was comprised of Sidney Webb's London Program, and Liberal/Radical reform.²⁰ McBriar, no doubt relying upon the inspiration of Pease, proceeded to emphasize what he perceived to be Fabian ends: the preemption of the masses from direct political action in matters of national policy; and the presentation of a series of pre-approved alternatives only to the electorate.²¹

The above interpretations notwithstanding, Hobsbawm, in a rare instance of agreement with Cole, believed that any Socialist attitudes within the Society

were secondary to the Society's democratic and eclectic outlook.²² McBriar, tracing further the evolution of Radical Fabian policy, concluded that the Fabians became more "Republican" in their transportation from their drawing-room origins to the caldron of metropolitan politics of the late 1880s.²³ Pelling, perhaps the most caustic of the Fabian critics, labeled them mere "Londoners"; their evolution, he added, in contrast to McBriar's analysis, was from middle class dandyism to the status of propagandists and merchants of a common information bureau.²⁴

Although the question of leadership and even policy remains obscure in many of the treatments of the Society, informed scholarly opinion is united in attributing the entire Fabian movement to a numerically small group. In comparing their resources with contemporary organizations, it can also be demonstrated that the Fabians were outnumbered and generally outfinanced by both the S.D.F. and the I.L.P., the organizations representing contemporary political parties, and most union groups. That the Fabians were also overwhelmingly English can be demonstrated as well. While it is debatable whether or not that in itself is significant, Pease went so far as to claim that

It [Fabianism] based Socialism not on the speculations of a German philosopher, but on the obvious evolution of society as we see it around us. It accepted economic science as taught by the accredited British professors; it built up the edifice of Socialism on the foundations of our existing social and political institutions: it proved that Socialism was but the next step in the development of society, rendered inevitable by the changes which followed from the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century.²⁵

Despite such a vision, the Fabians never formed a political party or came to power as a group. None at all held a post of national significance until well into the twentieth century.

Objectively, the early Fabian notables, so often touted by the group itself, amounted to no more than a dozen struggling writers, professionals, and civil servants, generally unknown and universally unheeded before the early 1890s. Nevertheless, the Fabian Society has acquired legendary status in British period settings, reviews, and histories. Whether or not the Society has any relevance beyond its own time is a question which must be subsequently treated in a separate and summary manner.

While few of the Fabians' goals were actually achieved, their intellectual influence and notoriety were not insignificant. It is important to differentiate,

however, between notoriety based on effective promotional technique and control, and a reputation based upon the achievement of specific political goals or the realization of definable and measurable influences upon key political or financial figures and institutions.

The classical compendium of Fabian feats and achievements is Edward R. Pease's History of the Fabian Society. Therein he relates Fabian activities in a causative sense to the formation of both the I.L.P. and the Labour Party. His description of Fabian programs, which was aimed at the municipalization of key industries in the private sector (especially utilities, education, and transportation), stresses the utility of Fabian evolutionary tactics in realizing fair wages, the protection of labor, old age pensions, the payment of MPs, workmen's compensation, and a national health scheme. A key factor in this process, of course, was the Fabians' alleged disposal and discreditation of Karl Marx and the development of a progressive tax structure to diminish and redistribute unearned wealth. While subsequent scholars and commentators have minimized causal Fabian influence in the LRC as well as the Labour Party, several have alluded to the Fabians' talents in the areas of statistical manipulation, coordination, and

and organization. McBriar, certainly one of the most knowledgeable researchers of Fabian doctrine, its development, and influence, attributes what successes the Fabians enjoyed to their talent for administration rather than their skill as propagandists for reform.²⁶ Hobsbawm in essence agrees, stressing that philosophically the Fabians left no heirs; rather they influenced some minor contemporary controversies through their talent for coordination (versus that of invention). The Fabians' reputation in recent scholarly literature on the group appears to bear this out.

Despite the claims and denials of the last century, some uniformity of opinion emerges in attributing certain unique contributions to the Fabians. While Pelling and the Fabian historians (notably Pease and Cole) are alone in the attribution of permeation to the Fabians, Hobsbawm and McBriar propose that the Fabians, in fact, did make unique contributions to the fields of economics, political science, and government. Hobsbawm, in his Cambridge University dissertation, credits Fabian ingenuity with the development of the distribution theory and the combination of efficiency, social reform, and marginal functions in clarifying and dealing with the social and institutional problems of

late nineteenth and early twentieth century England. McBriar, in bolder terms, attributes Revisionist theory in Germany to the Fabians.²⁷ While this claim is certainly well defined, it is qualified elsewhere by McBriar's more fundamental belief that the Fabians did not, in fact, formulate any original ideas, but rather facilitated progressive developments through the coordination and amalgamation of Radical and Socialist programs which were to have some impact on future British legislation, especially in the area of taxation.²⁸ The myths, of course, have been largely stripped away by the works of Hobsbawm, McBriar, and others.²⁹ Despite the group's survival and visibility in light of its actual size and probable achievements, their continued existence, one could conjecture, would be enigmatic were they not now, as then, a London group.

The survival and visibility of the group can no doubt be attributed in part to the early Fabian notables, each of whom had his own interpretation of the Society's essence. Nearly all contemporary accounts originating with the Fabians predictably extolled the virtues and success, the influence and importance of the Society far beyond realistic limits.³⁰ To E.R. Pease, the Society's loyal and drudging Secretary, the importance and meaning

of the group lay in its Englishness and adaptability to the English situation.³¹ To Sidney Webb, later influential in the founding of the London School of Economics and Political Science, the secret of success lay in its "uniquely" developed policy of permeation.³² Bernard Shaw, impetuous to the end, insisted that Fabianism, first in the defense of reason and progress, was responsible for "tossing out Marx" and for giving the Liberals their platform ideas and then bettering them. Although most of these claims appear to have been excessive, one pair of questions still remains. How did the Society survive barrages of criticism and attacks from more traditionally rooted adversaries, and, how did it build a favorable and lasting public image?

Despite their traditional political image, the Fabians, under the impetus of Sidney Webb, thought that they had a new and unique weapon in the policy of permeation. It was through the utilization of this tactic, according to Webb, that the Fabians, in the spirit of the Trojans and their legendary horse, would enter the ranks and minds of the politically influential by providing them with programs, ideas, opinion, and research heavily documented with statistics which could be conveniently drafted into public policy.³³ While

Pelling related permeation specifically to Fabian attempts to penetrate and influence the Liberal Party,³⁴ and Hobsbawm extended it to encompass all involvements,³⁵ outside the formal activities of the Society this tactic is universally acknowledged to have failed to achieve both its desired and projected ends. To Hobsbawm, permeation was a dead letter by 1893 due to the Fabians' miscalculations of the political situation.³⁶ Cole, accepting Beatrice Webb's position that permeation was tenable at least until 1911, admits that the Fabians on more than one occasion "backed the wrong horse".³⁷ Pelling takes the position what while permeation of the Liberal Party failed, it failed more through the Fabians' inability to see that London was not all of England than through any inherent fault in the tactic of permeation itself.³⁸ This is the same basic position taken by McBriar some years later,³⁹ although McBriar goes further in intimating that there was some resistance in Fabian ranks to the tactic of permeation, especially by Hubert Bland and the "independents" of the group.⁴⁰

Most authorities, with the exception of the Fabians Pease and Cole, consider the Society to have been ineffectual after World War I. Most, in fact, classify the Society as a failure in terms of achievements versus

objectives.⁴¹ Fabian memory and substance remain, however, while more or less spectacular failures as the Fellowship of the New Life and the Socialist League are relegated largely to the area of historical curiosity. Cole attributes this phenomenon to the Fabians' English Clubby nature and penchant for hard work on the part of all the individuals who belonged to the group.⁴² A more appropriate starting point, however, may be to investigate the organization and operation of the Society. Especially relevant to such a search would be an investigation of the initiating and coordinating body known as the Executive Committee, considered by some to have been the brain, by others the mouth, of the Fabians and their particular brand of political philosophy known as Fabian Socialism.

FOOTNOTES

¹Hubert Bland in business, Sidney Webb in career advancement in the Civil Service, Edward R. Pease in stockbroking and furniture making, George Bernard Shaw in writing.

²E.J. Hobsbawm, "Fabianism and the Fabians, 1884-1914" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1950), p. 24. Herein Hobsbawm (and Shaw) agree that the Fabian Society differed from contemporary opposition political groups chiefly in restricting its collective appeal to middle class persons.

³Hobsbawm, "Fabianism," p. 166.

⁴A.M. McBriar, The History of the Fabian Society (London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1963 new edition), p. 54. Henry Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 49, 58.

⁵See especially p. 218 concerning the Fabians' distrust of democracy. Later in the twentieth century Shaw became increasingly enamored with strong leaders including Stalin and Mussolini; the Webbs became supporters of the nascent Soviet state.

⁶For example Robert Dahl, Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961); C. Wright Mills, The New Men of Power (New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1948); William O. Adyelotte, Allen G. Bogue, and Robert William Fogel, editors, The Dimensions of Quantitative Research in History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973). The most coherent synopsis of work in this field is to be found in Dankwart A. Rustow, "The Study of Elites: Who's Who, When, and How," in World Politics, 18 (1966), 691-717.

⁷The bulk of the Fabian Archives have recently been relocated from the Society's headquarters in London to the Nuffield College Library, Oxford. Also of great value are the Wallas Papers, the Passfield Papers, and some of the Shaw correspondence (as well as Edward R. Pease's manuscript proof of his History, with annotational comments by Shaw and Sidney Webb) in The British Library of Political and Economic Science, London. The British Library also holds the largest available collection of scrapbooks, circulars, and correspondence dealing with the Local Fabian Societies.

⁸Hobsbawm, "Fabianism"; Margaret Cole, The Story of Fabian Socialism (London: Mercury Books, 1963); Pease, History; Pelling, Origins; Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, The First Fabians (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977); McBriar, Fabian Socialism.

⁹Pease, History: "altogether constitutional in its outlook" (p. 54); "the Old Gang made no attempt to monopolize . . ." (p. 179); "the Fabian Society has never possessed one single outstanding leader" (p. 237).

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 109, 142, 212, 259.

¹¹Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Also of special interest is a letter from Sidney Webb to Graham Wallas, written on the day of his (Webb's) father's death. The letter stresses for the most part the importance of coordinating Fabian efforts and commenting on the election results (Letter from Webb to Wallas, June 3, 1892, Wallas Papers, Box 1, The British Library of Political and Economic Science, London).

¹²Cole, Story, pp. 27, 32. In Cole's introduction to Pease's History (3rd edition), group unity is laboriously attributed to such devices as a rotating chairmanship and a Presidency which "carried no element of leadership".

¹³Ibid., especially p. 28.

¹⁴Hobsbawm, "Fabianism," pp. 37-38, 101, 122.

¹⁵McBriar, Fabian Socialism, pp. 8 (f.n. 2), 111-12, 254.

¹⁶Cole, introduction, History. Pease, History, pp. 102-103, 237.

¹⁷E.g. Pelling, p. 128, which describes Scott Holland's C.S.U. publication, the Economic Review, as having a "rather Fabian air". Other examples abound, all attributing thought, style, and rhetoric to "Fabian" versus any individual sources. Only in the case of Fabian lectures would this position have to be modified where debate for and against various Executive supported positions was allowed, and, occasionally, voted upon. Lectures, purified by debate and frequent compromise, were sometimes issued as Fabian leaflets or used as the basis of Fabian Tracts.

¹⁸Edward R. Pease, History, p. 111. "We did what all active politicians in a democratic country must do; we decided what the people ought to want, and endeavored to do two things, which, after all are much the same thing, to make people want it, and to make it appear that they wanted it."

¹⁹Cole, introduction, History; Pease, History, pp. 132-33.

²⁰Hobsbawm, "Fabianism," pp. 122ff. The latter part of the program Hobsbawm traces to the National Minimum promoted in the nascent Labor government, especially by the Webbs.

²¹McBriar, Fabian Socialism, pp. 74-75.

²²Hobsbawm, "Fabianism," pp. 163ff.

²³McBriar, Fabian Socialism, pp. 24, 79, 234.

²⁴Pelling, Origins, pp. 35, 95, 184.

²⁵Pease, History, pp. 90-91.

²⁶McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 233.

²⁷Hobsbawm, "Fabianism," pp. 46-51; McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 71. In this instance, McBriar appears to be taking the position that Pease did in his History.

²⁸McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 25.

²⁹Pease can only be read in the context of his position of official Fabian historian and spokesman for the group. Cole, although milder in her claims on behalf of the Fabians, writes from a similar position. Pelling wrote about the Fabians primarily in conjunction with the politics of the early Labourites. Hobsbawm, on the other hand, is the most objective; the MacKenzies' work the most descriptive; Pugh mainly a rehash.

³⁰Fabian Archives, Minute Books, Nuffield College, Oxford. Also E. R. Pease, History, p. 236, which boasts that the Fabians freed England from the "spell" of Marx. This claim is acknowledged by Cole and stressed by Hobsbawm and McBriar.

³¹Pease, History, p. 236.

³²Pease, History, p. 80; Pelling, Origins, p. 73. See also footnote 33 below.

³³Webb, frequently cited as the creator of permeation, attributed this tactic to Fabian foresight and ingenuity and identified it as the prime tool for the liberation of resources from the influential and wealthy. This view of Webb's is reminiscent of Feuerbach writing

in 1843 that "Quiet influence is the best. . . . Germany can only be cured by poison, not by fire and sword." See Feuerbach, Briefwechsel, p. 175, cited in David McLellan, The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx (New York: Praeger, 1969), pp. 115-16. Cole goes so far as to say that most "Fabian" innovations were adapted from their predecessors ("The Story of the Fabian Society," in Fabian Journal, IV, 54, 4).

³⁴Pelling, Origins, p. 73.

³⁵Hobsbawm, "Fabianism," p. 78. Shaw alone appears to have refused to work outside of the Society.

³⁶Ibid., p. 128.

³⁷Cole (Story, p. 80) attributes that political miscalculation to the Webbs (p. 84), adding "that by turning their backs on Parliament they tended to minimize the necessity of getting control of the national machinery itself, of having Ministers--not merely civil servants or Ministers' private secretaries--who were committed to Collectivist policies and would carry them out."

³⁸Pelling, Origins, pp. 73, 160.

³⁹McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 349.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 97.

⁴¹Included in this group are Hobsbawm, Pelling, McBriar, and, to some extent, Cole.

⁴²Cole, Story, pp. 57-59. Pp. 58-59 comment that "if he [the individual Fabian] had not done so, the volume of work and its influence would have been very much less than it was."

CHAPTER II

THE FABIAN EXECUTIVE: ITS ORGANIZATION AND SELECTION

At the first meeting of the newly constituted Fabian Society on January 4, 1884, a majority of the eleven Fabians present at that meeting resolved that an Executive Committee of three members be appointed to oversee the general operation of the Society. The motion, initiated by Edward R. Pease, called for the Committee to exercise its functions for a period of only three months. Within two years, however, the number of members on the Executive was expanded from three to seven, and their term of membership extended from three months to a year.¹ Shortly thereafter the membership of the Society formally invested the Executive with authority "to conduct the General Business of the Society, to prepare pamphlets and Tracts, and to appoint

delegates to represent the Society."²

In 1890, the Executive Committee was again expanded, this time to fifteen members from seven. While the rules and charter of the Fabian Society relative to both the expansion and operation of the Society were drafted and revised by members of the Executive itself, and were not substantially revised by the membership at large,³ the move was approved by the general membership, thereby giving the Executive a legitimate and acknowledged base of power. The general membership, it will be noted, was excluded from the arduous task of assigning or executing any substantial duties and responsibilities, while the Executive's duties and responsibilities were expanded to specifically include meeting monthly, circulating notices of meetings, issuing publications on behalf of the Society, approving any expenditures over £1, and bringing propositions before the Society.⁴ The organization functioned on the basis of this Executive restructuring until again, in 1892, the Executive, by its own proposal to the membership, expanded its scope and depth of operations.⁵ Significant in the rules of 1890, and confirmed in the new rules of 1892, was the Executive's control of the contents of the Society's official news organ (the Fabian News), the power to

appoint special committees, control over London Groups of the main Society, and control over matters affecting the nomination and election of individuals to the Society at large.

Constraints upon the Executive remained minimal throughout this period which, if anything, set the precedent that changes in the Society's philosophy or structure would come from above, and not from below. Even the rules of 1892, it should be noted, resulted from an Executive Committee fiat resolving that "Webb, Bland, Wallas, Olivier, and Pease be a committee to revise the rules with a view of bringing them into accord with the practice of the Society."⁶ In fact, it was not until 1894 that all members of the Society could vote for Executive Committee candidates at which point they could also post their ballots, subject to certain conditions.⁷

Additional control mechanisms which the Executive utilized included those of retroactively approving some (usually controversial) past action,⁸ side-stepping direct criticism and member opposition through relegating work and revisions to captive committees,⁹ and threatening would-be opponents of Executive policy decisions with committee retribution for failure to conform with certain Executive Committee requests.¹⁰ The

case of "Trade Options versus Trade Exemption" is an especially typical example of the manipulation of opinion through committees. This controversy stemmed from differences between the I.L.P. and the Fabian Society on the Eight Hours Question. The I.L.P. favored "Trade Exemption" in which two-thirds of the workers in a particular industry could vote to "exempt" themselves from an eight hour work day. Many of the Fabians, led by Webb, favored a more moderate "Trade Option" in which case the eight hour day would be optional upon the majority vote of the workers in a particular industry. The trade unions, however, favored Trade Exemption, thereby leading a large segment of the Fabian membership to support Exemption versus Option. Webb, supported by Wallas and Pease, was defeated. He offered, however, to serve on the redrafting committee. The result was a reversion to "Trade Option" which emerged from the committee some months later. Thus, although the Executive engaged in some questionable practices in whole or in part, it is apparent that the Committee itself was responsible for the majority of the Society's active planning, work, and administration. Moreover, it was a group which was legally constituted, legitimate in its base of power, and acknowledged by the membership as the

prime source of rule-making, discipline, and policy.

Given the thrust of the Executive in tackling operational problems and soliciting additional responsibilities of a complex and administrative nature, it is informative to note the constitution of the Executive Committee of this particular socialist organization. In 1892, for example, of the twenty one people who sat on the Executive in the course of this year, five were women, two were workers, six probably members of the old middle class and upper class (defined, in absence of other indicators, by education at Oxford or Cambridge), and eight members probably of the lower middle and new professional strata.¹¹ It is this Executive, in fact, that Hobsbawm defines as "the Fabian leadership."¹² It may prove misleading, however, to infer that the leadership of the Fabian Society was embodied totally in the Executive Committee; but given the role of the Executive in the Society's affairs, it is necessary to ascertain the composition of the Fabian leadership as well as its definition of its role relative to the Society at large.

As previewed above, the composition and nature of the Fabian Society's Executive Committee at any point between 1884 and 1900 was not what one would conjure as

being typical of an avowedly socialist group. The membership of the Executive itself appears to have been remarkably stable in comparison, for example, to the S.D.F. According to Cole, "the ten years following its enlargement to fifteen recorded only forty five names, which, allowing for deaths, removals, and pressures of business is a fairly low total."¹³ An investigation of Executive membership from the Society's records and minute books for comparison over an extended period of time yields similar yet more telling results. Of the fifty possible open seats on the Executive from 1884 through 1900, 34, or 68% went to persons who held them for three years or less. In looking at those who held them for longer than eight years, however, many prominent names come to light:

| <u>Years on Executive</u> | <u>Names</u> |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| 8 | Wallas |
| 11 | Standring |
| 13 | Oakeshott |
| | Pease |
| | Olivier |
| 15 | Webb |
| 16 | Shaw |
| 17 | Bland |

It can also be observed that those holding office for the longest periods were also those who received the highest number of votes upon reelection. This may also support the premise that despite allegations of

mismanagement made by various members, there was a measurable vote of approval of such actions by most members when election time arrived. In assessing the nature of the Fabians by the dawn of the twentieth century it should also be noted that with the decline in turnover and the passage of years, the Executive became remarkably continuous, collectively older, and more experienced and settled in management style. For the reader's information, a continuity chart is included herein as Appendix C below.

In analyzing the Executive membership specifically for leadership content, both contemporary and secondary sources are imprecise and at variance as to whom the Fabian (or Executive) leadership included. That the Fabian leadership was not receptive to working class enrollment, however, is known from contemporary sources such as Beatrice Webb's Diary and from perusal of Fabian publications. In one case the Fabian News reported the defeat of a motion brought before the Executive proposing a change of meeting hours to enable working men to attend.¹⁴ Hubert Bland appears to have captured a facet of this attitude in commenting on Shaw's Broadbent, Keegan, and Larry Doyle [John Bull's Other Island]:

We know who these rare persons are (quorum pars magna sum); they meet on alternate Fridays at 276 Strand [the Fabian office], and in a few short weeks, they will offer themselves for re-election to the Fabian

Executive.¹⁵

While most students of the Fabians indirectly addressed this question of Fabian Society and Executive Committee leadership, they infrequently addressed it in a causal manner. In many cases, moreover, the leadership of the Society and the leadership or constitution of the Executive are not treated in a related manner.

In secondary sources copious mention is made of Fabian doctrine, Fabian policy, etc. with scant attention paid to the fact that frequently the sources cited in support of "Fabian" pronouncements are limited to a very few individuals.¹⁶ While most authors of secondary works on the Fabians show preferences marked and varied, some common elements do emerge. To Cole, the leadership of the Fabian Society is identified with the Executive as a whole with Sidney Webb cast in the role of prime mover.¹⁷ McBriar, more specifically, attributes Fabian Society leadership to Sidney (and to a lesser extent Beatrice) Webb and to George Bernard Shaw.¹⁸ Elsewhere, he hedges with the statement that the "Old Gang" maintained control of the Fabian Society before World War I;¹⁹ that the leading Fabians were Sidney and Beatrice Webb, D.G. Ritchie, and Olivier;²⁰ that Besant, Shaw, Webb, Wallas, Bland, Clarke, Headlam, DeMattos, and Dell were the "leading Fabians;"²¹ that Shaw and Sparling were the

"inner circle of the Fabian Executive;"²² and that the leading Fabians were the Webbs, Wallas, Tawney, Ensor, and G.D.H. Cole.²³ Pease, more directly to the point, attributes leadership of the Executive specifically to Sidney Webb, who in his [Pease's] opinion could do no wrong.²⁴ Elsewhere, he concedes that Society matters were really undertaken by the "quadrumvirate," consisting of Shaw, Wallas, Webb, and Olivier.²⁵ Other combinations offered by various scholars who have written on the subject of the Fabians and the wider topic of socialism include the "Fabian Politbureau," consisting of Olivier, Webb, Bland, and Besant;²⁶ the leadership combination of Webb, Wallas, and Pease;²⁷ and the "directing Minds" of the Society, the Webbs and Shaw.²⁸

While contemporary and membership opinions relating to this question are expanded upon in the following chapter, it is noteworthy that there is a strong body of opinion favoring extraordinary influence by a small group of people connected with the Executive Committee, an opinion which is supported in the published literature on the subject only by Pease (favoring the dominance of Webb), who claimed that

All the initiation came from him. Shaw drafted most of the documents, but . . . Webb proposed the plans. Of the first sixty Fabian Tracts he wrote twenty-five. I can recollect only one occasion on which he

failed to get his way. . . .

Webb was a member of the Fabian Executive from 1886-1935, a much longer period than any other member except myself. He was at the head of the poll, at most, perhaps at all the elections, and he was a thoroughly regular attender. Indeed, he was an ideal committee man. As I wrote in my History, if he were a member of a committee, it may be assumed that any report or resolution adopted was drafted by him. . . . For something like thirty years I worked with him, or, when he dominated the Fabian Executive, in a sense under him.²⁹

The facade was doubtless influential in supporting the view taken by the Fabian historians Pease, Cole, and Pugh that there was a rule without divisive controversy on the Executive Committee (a notable exception being the Boer War Question), and that the Society spoke with one voice on diverse questions. This harmonious scenario was not in concert with the situations which existed especially in the S.D.F. and in the trade union movements which were frequently sparked with sometimes violent disagreements in matters of policy and group direction.

Another aspect of Executive Committee organizational control which enhanced an outward appearance of unity when facing the membership at large was the method of Executive Committee recruitment. Officially, any member of the Fabian Society could place the name of another member of the Society before the membership as a candidate for the Executive (at least after 1894). In fact, the Executive in existence, guided by the more

prominent members of that Committee, favored the emphasis of special knowledge and hard work as criteria for Executive Committee membership. This was usually accomplished by the method of association, whereby a prospective Executive member would be invited to participate in lectures, meetings, sub-committee work, etc., and thereby be co-opted onto the Executive. The co-option process was completed either at the time of the Society's annual Executive Committee elections, or, if possible, by the Executive Committee's exercise of its right to appoint a member of their own choice to fill any vacancies which occurred during the course of a year.

On several occasions, future Executive Committee members were specially invited to Executive Committee meetings before the time of their election and subsequent installation as members of the Committee.³⁰ Some were in service on various sub-committees before achieving membership on the Executive,³¹ although the incidence of this type of co-option was quite low, as most sub-committees were controlled directly by the Executive members or contained people who specifically demanded sub-committee assignments amid accusations of excessive Executive control. The other route to Executive membership appeared to be through the lecture circuit

which implied in most cases an income from stocks, family, or a pension, as well as ample blocks of free time.³²

An additional aspect of the Fabian Executive philosophy which was dominant throughout the period influenced by the Society's founders (or "Old Gang") was the dependence upon and desirability of soliciting experts in various areas. It is this aspect of the Society's personality, in fact, that dictated to a substantial degree, the minimum quality of potential membership material to be solicited. Sidney Webb in particular appears to have favored utilizing those with specialized knowledge of specialized problems in keeping with his training in the British civil service. In one particular series of six lectures given in 1896 Webb frequently utilized metaphors on this theme involving the organic nature of society. Society was an organism, he held, and each cell should be specialized to do its own work.

Devices like rotation of office were based on the assumption, which is erroneous, that one person could govern as well as another. . . . Popular election . . . led to the election of the best known rather than the best man. . . . Examinations and adequate selection committees were the only ways of choosing experts on the basis of their expertness. Their places should be permanent, their pay sufficient. . .

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This type of concentration is amplified by other Executive members and some of the membership closely

involved with the Society's operations. One such member, S.G. Hobson, first a member of the Society, and then a member of the Executive until his resignation over policy matters, commented as follows:

We [the Executive] would each have a draft [of Tracts] in ample time to read and consider. Then we gave it corporate examination. Always there was somebody with the requisite special or expert knowledge; Shaw and Bland naturally saw to the literary quality. . . .³⁴

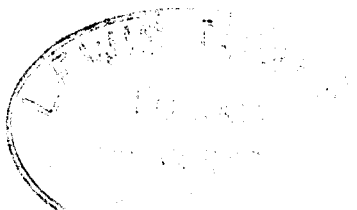
In Hobson's case, the names of Webb, Pease, Olivier, and Wallas figure prominently, emphasizing again the existence of an identifiable but vaguely boarded leadership in the Fabian Society. The identification of Fabian leadership concerns, however, has been more precisely conjectured.

Wiener, in his study of Graham Wallas, associates the Fabian leadership specifically with the broader concerns of middle and upper class Victorians in a collectivist environment. In Webb's case, the fundamental axiom for Fabian leadership was "faith in expertise to make up for the inadequacies of the demos,"³⁵ where the most important tasks should fall to the best qualified. The solution for Shaw, at least after 1891, was more emphasis on leadership versus classical democracy where democracy, "a romantic notion," was compounded by the "stupidity of the exploited class."³⁶ Such an interpretation is supportable given

the vogue of Darwinism and its political implications as seen in the writings of those such as Bagehot and Sir Henry Maine.

It would appear, therefore, that the qualifications for "effective" Executive Committee candidates were not the same as those for general membership in the Society, although there was no written proviso to the contrary. As attendance at meetings was a requirement for Executive Committee membership, perhaps the scheduling of these, plus many subcommittee activities and meetings which were held at hours concurrent with shop and factory times, precluded the majority of the membership from standing for the Executive, or for that matter, even voting. Besides time, the other crucial prerequisite for Executive candidates was money. Those on the lecture circuit were frequently expected to stand for their own expenses for board and room while on the road. In some cases, members on the lecture circuit also paid for their own transportation, although Executive Committee members who traveled on Society business were generally supported by the operating funds of the Society.

The election process itself was conducted once a year at the time of the members' annual meeting in mid to



late April. At that time, as outlined above, Executive Committee members were elected from a predetermined selection of candidates. Nominations of candidates from the floor of the membership meetings were not permitted.³⁷ Bland and Pease were routinely elected Treasurer and Secretary respectively by the Executive without opposition.³⁸ Even with such seemingly loose control, the retiring Executive effectively backed only those whom they favored or wanted for membership on the Committee. This facet of the elections holds true especially in situations where extensive campaigning and electioneering for Executive support was carried out. In the case of the 1894 elections, for example, the Fabian News retorted that "it is noteworthy that of the eight new candidates, the three who canvassed or were canvassed for actively, secured 9th, 10th, and 13th places respectively. Of the remaining five who did not canvass, one occupied the place of the last elected, and four were not elected."³⁹ An example of the activities conducted by the Executive leadership which were never officially acknowledged in the proceedings, meetings, or publications of the Society is that of the writing campaign of Sidney Webb for the elections of 1900. This open letter was circulated among the membership to counter those "rebels" who felt that the Executive,

especially the long standing members of that group, had exerted undue influence over the membership and the direction of the Society.

. On this occasion a vigorous attempt is being made by certain new candidates to get themselves and their friends elected; and the usual step has in some instances been taken by asking members to vote **only** for these eight candidates. This may have the unfortunate result of excluding from the Executive two or three very useful workers, whose silent service to the Society is less well known to the members. . . . If you wish a continuance of the Society on the same general lines as heretofore, I advise you to vote for the eleven candidates named below. . . . Bland, Bell, Macrosty, Oakeshott, Miss O'Brien, Pease, Shaw, Mrs. Shaw, Standring, Webb, Whelen.⁴⁰

Thus, through official channels within the Society, and through the strength of their personal reputations among the membership at large, Webb and the other Fabians predominant on the Executive at that time, were able, through constitutional means, to maintain a clear majority on the Fabian Executive into the twentieth century. In reviewing existing literature on socialism, this was a record unmatched by any other prominent English socialist group, from the foundation of the Fabians, in 1884, up to that time.⁴¹

FOOTNOTES

¹E.R. Pease recommended the extended term. The expansion of numbers, proposed by Hubert Bland and Annie Besant, was intended to broaden the membership at large's

base of influence and to ease the Executive Committee's workload (see Executive Committee Minutes, March 19, 1886. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford).

²Ibid., April 16, 1886, Rule 2 as reported in Members' Meeting for the same date (also Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford).

³At the end of the typescript organizational description appears the following note, penned in Pease's hand: "The above is the scheme of organization adopted without amendment (except in hour of meeting) at the Executive Committee held 22nd April 1890." The proposal and notice appear as a one page printed circular entitled "Fabian Society" March 1, 1890 .

⁴See Executive Minute Books, April 20, 1890 in Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Also of interest are comments in the Executive Minute Book C/8/B/2 of February 25, 1890 which confirms the above. At this time sub-committees, overseen by the Executive, were also established. The contents of the 1890 resolutions approving and authorizing such action appear below as Appendix A.

⁵See Appendix B below for the 1892 rule proposals. The size of the Executive Committee remained the same (fifteen). Proposals to change the number of members sitting on the Executive (to five in 1884; to seven in 1885; to twenty in 1892; and to five again in 1898) were defeated by the membership, upon the recommendation of the Executive Committee (see Executive Minute Books for December 18, 1884; March 19, 1885; and Fabian News for April, 1892; December, 1892; and June, 1898).

⁶Executive Minute Books, January 12, 1892. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁷Fabian News, III (3), May, 1893 and IV (1), March, 1894. Especially irksome to independent and non-London resident members was the requirement that members voting the Executive candidates must sign their ballots, or, if voting in person, be required to sign a register. The Executive Minutes of February 2, 1894 add that records of voting preferences would be kept on file for future reference.

⁸For example the Fabian withdrawal from the Joint Committee in the summer of 1893 (see Fabian News, III (9), November, 1893).

⁹As, for example, in Webb's "Trade Exemption" battle in Fabian Tract 9; see Workman's Times for November 21, 1891; May 21, 1892; and November 12, 1892.

¹⁰See, for example, letter from Macrosty to Wallas, May 24, 1900, Wallas Papers, Box 2, The British Library of Political and Economic Science, London. Herein Macrosty supports Sidney Webb's Tract on Education claiming that "If you accept Webb's [section] "c" as it stands . . . the tract will at once go into proof. If you don't . . . we shall thrash the matter out in open committee."

¹¹E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour (New York: Basic Books, 1964), p. 258.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Cole, Story, p. 52.

¹⁴Fabian News, September, 1892; see also Executive Minute Books, September 23, 1892. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹⁵Fabian News, February, 1899. Cited in McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 87.

¹⁶McBriar, in his study, cited "official" Fabian sources 275 times for the period from 1884 to 1914. Of these citations, 139 are Tracts, 73 Annual Reports, and 56 other publications appearing with the Fabian imprint. Seven are archival and private Society sources. Of the 139 Tract references cited, 46, or 33%, were written by Shaw and 37, or 27%, were written by Sidney Webb. Of the total 1167 citations in McBriar, the breakdown by source groups gives one a representative picture of the origins of Fabian Doctrine in this case:

| <u>total</u> | <u>Sources cited</u> | <u>No. citations</u> | <u>% of</u> |
|--------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| | Shaw (Tracts) | 46 | 3.9 |
| | Shaw (total citations) | 177 | 15.2 |
| | Webb (Tracts) | 37 | 3.2 |
| | Webb (total citations) | 195 | 16.7 |
| | Pease (<u>History</u>) | 62 | 5.3 |
| | Pease (total citations) | 67 | 5.7 |
| | Fabian Archives | 7 | 0.6 |
| | Contemporary Sources | 184 | 15.8 |
| | Secondary Sources | 162 | 13.9 |
| | Government Reports | 61 | 5.2 |
| | Contemporary Press | 75 | 6.4 |

In this case, the chances are significant (about one chance in three), that when McBriar refers to a "Fabian" concept or point of view, he will be referring to one of the originators of Fabianism itself, namely Shaw or Webb. Although an extensive analysis of all works on the Fabians would be required to definitively support the thesis that McBriar's treatment and distribution of sources is representative, it is my feeling that given the importance of many of the projects with which the "Old Gang" were involved, it would be virtually impossible to select at least one work of five that had not been influenced in the drafting or revision by Webb or Shaw (who, through the Executive Committee and by private agreement, had considerable influence on committees dealing with publications). Typical of older secondary works (see, for example, Joseph Clayton, The Rise and Decline of Socialism in Great Britain, 1884-1924 (London: n.p., 1926)) is an overreliance on the words of Shaw as being the words of the Fabian Society.

¹⁷Cole, Story, p. 7. See also Cole, "The Story of the Fabian Society," in Fabian Journal, IV, 1954.

¹⁸McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 254.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 176.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 149-52.

²¹McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 179.

²²Ibid., p. 252.

²³Ibid., p. 347.

²⁴Claims Pease, "In the first thirty years of the Fabian Society, Webb dominated the Executive Committee, not because he was in the least bit dictatorial, but because he was always wise and right" (Margaret Cole, ed., The Webbs and Their Work (London: n.p., 1949), pp. 22-23). Those intimating, with Pease, that Webb had extraordinary control over the Society include Cole, Story, p. 88; R. Harrison, "The Young Webb, 1859-92," in Bulletin, No. 15 (Sheffield: Society for the Study of Labour History, 1977), 15-18; Hal Draper, "The Fabian and the African," in Dissent, Winter, 1965, 76-83; and Philip M. Crane, The Democrat's Dilemma (Chicago: Henry Regery Co., 1964), pp. 30-31.

²⁵Edward R. Pease, "G.B.S., 1856-1950: Early Days," in Fabian Journal, 3 (February, 1951), pp. 9-11.

²⁶Crane, Dilemma, p. 27.

²⁷Ensor, in Cole, ed., Webbs and Work, pp. 58-59.

²⁸H.B. Lees-Smith, Encyclopedia (London: n.p., 1928), II.

²⁹Pease, in Cole, ed., Webbs and Work, pp. 22-23.

³⁰For example Sidney Webb (see Executive Minute Books, January 15, 1886. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford); Sandham and Lowerison (Executive Minute Books for May 16, 1892); Utley (Ibid., June 20, 1892. Utley, elected a member of the Executive Committee for 1893, was appointed to fill a vacancy which opened in mid 1892; see also Executive Minute Books for September 26, 1892); Priestly (Ibid., July 21, 1893; November 28, 1892; December 5, 1892; and December 8, 1892); and Dodd (Ibid., March 18, 1898).

³¹For example Green (Ibid., October 22, 1897 and October 29, 1897).

³²Those who entered the ranks of the Executive through lecturing or related work included Webb, Clarke, Wallas, Headlam, DeMattos, Dell, Massingham, MacDonald, and Macrosty. In at least one documented instance, an experienced lecturer applying for a position on the circuit was refused work for lack of a supplemental income (Harry Snell; see Executive Minute Books for September 22, 1893).

³³McBriar, Fabian Socialism, pp. 76-77.

³⁴Cole, Story, p. 52.

³⁵Martin J. Wiener, Between Two Worlds: The Political Thought of Graham Wallas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 36. Also useful is the MacKenzies' work which stresses the upper class backgrounds of the leading Fabians juxtaposed with the deteriorating condition of Victorian society beginning in the 1880s. The crucial point made by the MacKenzies is that Victorian stability was breaking up due to the decline of Britain's industrial supremacy, national economic problems, competition from Germany and the United States, and the

chronic trade slump which started in 1879. The advent of Darwinism, coupled with these problems had undermined the Evangelical faith "which energized the Victorian middle classes," thus shaking credibility in revealed religion and driving the faithful to seek alternative intellectual systems (pp. 15-16).

³⁶Wiener, Between Two Worlds, p. 36.

³⁷Members standing for reelection had stars (*) next to their names in the 1890s as a "voting aid."

³⁸See Fabian News, April, 1892 and April, 1894. While the Treasurer could be elected by postal ballot from 1894 onward (cf. Fabian News, March, 1894), the position of Secretary was reserved for election by the Executive Committee only.

³⁹Fabian News, IV, 3, May, 1894. The Executive controlled not only the News, but also the membership lists, which were sometimes not published.

⁴⁰Letter from Sidney Webb to an unaddressed party, April 13, 1900. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Of those mentioned for election in Webb's letter, ten of eleven were elected high on the ticket. Those not recommended by Webb, but elected, numbered five, three having had some previous term of Executive Committee service.

⁴¹For example the Christian Socialists (Pease, History, pp. 25-26), the I.L.P. and the Labor Party (Ibid., pp. 97, 101; Pelling, Origins, pp. 173 ff., 179-81), the Socialist League (Pease, History, pp. 66, 202; Pelling, Origins, p. 138), the Clarion Clubs (Ibid.), and the S.D.F. (Pelling, Origins, p. 84). Such groups, nevertheless, frequently included outstanding individuals such as Stewart Headlam (Guild of Saint Matthew), Hyndman (the S.D.F.), Morris (the Socialist League), and Blatchford (the Clarion Club).

CHAPTER III

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF EXECUTIVE CONTROL

One of the primary expressed reasons for expanding the membership of the Executive Committee had been to broaden the basis of influence of the membership at large.¹ Coincidentally such a reorganization was to relieve the pressures of Executive overwork by distributing the workload among a larger number of Executive members. Despite this arrangement, as well as the establishment of the Committee System Organization of 1890 absolving Executive members from meeting more often than monthly, it is apparent that a majority of the Executive met at least once every other week, in addition to organizing committee and sub-committee functions which many of the Executive felt compelled to attend.²

Although the majority of actions undertaken by this select group of Fabians was supported by the membership as a whole through the annual and members' meetings which were periodically held, there was some concern amongst a minority of the regular membership and a minority on the

Executive, that the Executive majority was assuming more control than the Fabian charter intended or circumstances warranted.

Before exploring the source, magnitude, and resolution of allegations of "power politics" on the part of the Executive Committee, an analysis of the extant records of the Fabian Society is in order. Such an analysis suggests that if, in fact, some conflict occurred, it would most likely occur in one or more of six different areas which the sources record as subjects of ongoing Executive action: control of the membership; control of delegates representing the Fabian Society at external functions; control of Society procedures and policies; control of information flow and interface between the Fabian Society and external (non-Fabian) individuals and groups; control of committees; and control of spoils. The financial affairs of the Society which were a cause of some concern to especially knowledgeable members, are discussed below in a separate chapter, as are relations with Local Societies and Groups (defined as those Fabians organized outside the confines of the main London Society).

While the Executive Committee had no specific duty to control the size and composition of the

membership, this is one area to which the Executive devoted considerable, if irregular, effort. All members, since the early days of the Fabian Society, were expected as a matter of course to subscribe to the basic aims and principles of the Fabian Society as embodied in the Basis, or articles of faith.³ Beyond this basic requirement, little was specified relative to membership requirements until the reorganization of the early 1890s except the Executive's concession that those refused admission to the Society by the Executive could appeal to the membership and gain admission if 80% or more of the general membership so moved.⁴ While there had also been a requirement that candidates attend at least two regular (public) members' meetings before being considered as a candidate for membership, it was not until 1891 that the Executive decided, on its own authority, that two attendances at the meetings of the London Groups in which a candidate resided may, on the recommendation of the Group's secretary (appointed and/or approved by the Executive of the London Society), be accepted as compliance with Rule 8 with respect to attendance of a visitor at meetings.⁵

It was during this period of the early 1890s that the Executive raised some proposals which bear on the

subject of membership control and the selection and acceptance of applicants. A printed letter of acceptance "directed by the Executive Committee," confirmed early in 1891 that "although there is no compulsory subscription, [members] are expected to contribute annually to the Society's funds."⁶ Later that year, however, the question of compulsory subscriptions was raised again, but not acted upon. Instead, "it was agreed to put note in News urging care in nominating candidates, and stating 'that the Executive would require a letter from both proposer and seconder in all future cases'."⁷ Of the members for which both sponsorship and biographical information survives from 1890 to 1900 (1004 of 1392 individuals), 134, or 13% of the total membership during that period for which documentation exists, were elected from proposals made by the General Secretary (Edward R. Pease) without seconder. Adding the 89 single (i.e. unseconded) proposals made by other members of the Executive, a total of 223 individuals, or 22% of the membership for which there is information, were directly and singly proposed by the Executive (including the Fabian Secretary, who was also an Executive member). Of the total proposals for the Society membership from 1884 to 1900, the Executive as a group recruited 388 of 1538

members, or 25% of the gross membership elected.⁸

The issue of forced subscriptions also surfaced one more time in earnest in 1893. At that time the Executive again proposed that each candidate, whether elected to membership or not, must pay an entrance fee of 5s.⁹ At a members' meeting of April 14th, the amendment requiring an entrance fee of 5s was the only Executive motion struck down. The membership did agree, however, that a compulsory fee was agreeable, but that the amount was to be left open.¹⁰

While rules and regulations thus evolved for the screening, admission, and retention of members, such laboriously developed precedents were not uniformly administered by the Executive, at least from the mid 1890s. As early as 1893, mention is made in the records of the Executive Committee of members "excused from subscriptions," not from an inability to pay, but rather from their potential usefulness to the Society in the opinion of the Executive.¹¹ Similarly, members unable to pay were, at the direction of the Executive, "purged."¹²

A pivotal area of membership control which the Executive reserved to itself whenever possible was that of the organization and direction of membership functions. As early as 1887 a circular was issued by the

Executive protesting the apathy of the membership at large, a criticism which is difficult to take seriously in light of the Executive's relationship with and view of the mass of the membership. Webb, moving on behalf of the Executive, proposed "that a committee be appointed to amend the printed Statement of the Basis, Aims, etc. of the Society, and that such a committee shall consist of the Executive Committee and six other members."¹³ Although Webb's proposal was not supported, a similar motion incorporating eight instead of six members in addition to the Executive was passed. The new recommendations included dividing up the London membership into Groups, each coordinated by the Secretary of the central Fabian Society's London office; the undertaking of press and campaign work on a regular basis; and the division of Society meetings into two sections: educational and propagandist. The latter was to rotate monthly in London, each section eventually to be formed by a local group of members, and "such members of the Executive as may be delegated for that purpose." The educational section was to serve primarily as a discussion group.¹⁴

By 1891, the Executive had structured membership duties and obligations finely enough so as to require the

issuance of a four page circular detailing such obligations and duties of Fabian members. The essence of the members' function at that time was to contribute money to the Society's treasury, purchase Fabian literature, promote the gospel of the Society through letter writing campaigns and local discussion groups, recruit additional members, and advise the Executive of possible Tract titles and new opportunities to further the work of the Society.¹⁵ By 1894, the attitude of the Executive toward member participation, other than that outlined above, had soured considerably. In the case of that year's annual meeting, " [it was] agreed to have none unless something turns up."¹⁶

The existence and incidence of control of Fabian delegates by the Executive is a great deal more obvious and quantifiable than some other aspects of Executive planning and intervention, for in the ten year period from 1890 to 1900 when the bulk of the Fabian delegations were sent to various outside functions, 34 of the 35 appointments (in many cases multiple), or 97.1%, involved the dispatch of a delegate or delegates who were currently sitting on the Executive Committee. In only one case was a non-Executive member dispatched to an outside function as a representative of the Society, that

being the case of S.D. Shallard, early I.L.P. activist and Fabian who was appointed on the recommendation of Pease and DeMattos.¹⁷ Even in such cases as the majority, however, Executive delegates were instructed precisely as to how they should act, vote, speak, and otherwise conduct themselves in any given situation.¹⁸ Concern over the control of this area of the Society's activities resulted in one case (that of the controversial Socialist Joint Committee) where controls were established to avoid any possible bolt or misadventure once delegates were beyond Executive confines. The resolution accomplishing this was passed in the following form:

Joint Committee. Resolved that our delegates be instructed to move that an agenda paper be sent to each member of the Committee 10 days before each meeting, and that except on matters of routine or detail, our delegates be instructed not to vote on any resolution which has not appeared on the agenda paper. . . . Also that a copy of this resolution be sent to the secretary of the Joint Committee.¹⁹

This procedure allowed the Executive Committee to review and counsel delegates on any important matters which might be put to a vote in sessions of the Joint Committee.

An additional facet of the Executive's control in the matter of delegates was shown by that body later in the summer of 1893 when it decided, without the benefit

of counsel from the membership, to break and withdraw from the Joint Committee following policy differences with representatives of the I.L.P. and S.D.F.²⁰ This move was especially daring given the popularity of the concept of a unified socialist or workingmen's party among the membership of the Society and even among some members of the Executive. The actual communication, sent to the secretary of the Joint Committee on the motion of Sidney Webb, starkly reported that "the Fabian Executive regrets that it sees no advantage in continuing the attendance of its delegates, but whenever any practicable opportunity for joint action arises the Fabian Society will be glad to cooperate with the other Socialist bodies."²¹ The Executive's firm control of delegates, including their votes and actions, previews one of the elements of control mastered by the Executive leadership but decried by various segments of the membership. This powerful element was the Executive's control of the policy and procedure of the Society through the interpretation of rules, the formulation of "committees for special purposes," and control of various other aspects of the Society's assets and organization which are described below.

As will be seen in the following chapter, a

minority of the Fabian membership occasionally petitioned the Executive to be more careful in considering the rights and interests of the membership at large. While little came of most of these complaints, they indicate that the Executive, on some occasions, carved new areas of responsibility and control by utilizing the previously uncontested practices of the formation and interpretation of rules. The earliest example of such actions which had Society-wide impact was the formation and organization of the Parliamentary League in 1886. Scholarly opinion interprets the constitution of this group as an attempt to reconcile the right and left extremes of the Fabian Society.²² It was also recognized that the formation of such a body would by definition dissuade the Anarchist faction of the Society, under the leadership of Mrs. Charlotte Wilson, from political involvement within the Fabian Society.²³ The minutes of the Executive Committee make clear that only Fabians were eligible for membership in the League, and that its constitution--proposed, refined, and ratified by the Executive--would be controlled by the Executive without whose guidance "it will compete with and break up the Society."²⁴ In further explaining the purpose of the League, "on behalf of the Executive Committee," Hubert Bland specifically

avored the organization of the League in "the form of a Political Committee of the Fabian Society."²⁵ The Rules of the League, drafted by Annie Besant and revised by G.B. Shaw, required a minimum annual subscription of 2s 6d, an annual meeting, and scheduled quarterly meetings as a minimum. It was charged with the organization of Socialist opinion; influencing Parliament, municipalities, "and other representative bodies"; arranging lectures; analyses of contemporary publications; and working "for or against proposed measures of social reform according as they tend towards, or away from, the Socialist ideal."²⁶ Over the next year the League conducted its business under the guidance of Executive members and sympathizers, the most important and prominent of whom was Graham Wallas. It was Wallas, in fact, who proposed, as a member of the Executive Committee, that the Parliamentary League be absorbed into the Fabian Society as the Political Committee. This step brought to fruition Bland's (and the Executive's) plan to neutralize opposition within the Society which had been discretely formulated almost two years previously.²⁷ Wallas' motion was passed without opposition and the Parliamentary League, minus the Anarchists, was reabsorbed into the Fabian Society as a committee

responsible for the political activities of the Fabian Society.

The concept of control by committees, engineered so successfully by the Fabian Executive, was expanded some time later to include groups known as "committees for special purposes." These groups were committees which were constituted ad hoc to deal with special or delicate problems.²⁸ The advantages of these committees were that they could be constituted at the discretion of the Executive without seeking the approval of or involvement from the membership at large. The powers and organization of such committees were modified somewhat at a later date as will be described below. Other rules and regulations instituted by the Executive to secure their leadership within the Society included a requirement that three-fourths of the Society's general membership approve any amendments to the Basis;²⁹ the invalidation of members' votes in Executive bye-elections which did not carry the voters' signatures or other identification papers;³⁰ the restriction of voting hours in elections to from 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. on weekdays and from 10:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. on Saturdays;³¹ and the necessity of having written ballots to break ties in bye-elections "as the rules do not provide for a tie at a bye-election."³²

From the beginning of the 1890s the Executive also ruled that no proxy votes would be allowed at the Annual Meeting of the membership.³³ This measure further allayed Executive fears that a minority of the membership could thwart Executive control through the mere solicitation of proxies.

That the Executive controlled the agenda of the annual and members' meetings is well known. Through this tactic, together with careful rehearsals for the chairing of meetings and the conduct of business, most meetings involving the membership were forums in which the Executive, through their superior organizational skills, carried motions substantially intact. This allowed them to maintain their base of power constitutionally with the support of the Society's membership as a whole. The Executive exercised additional power, however, which in the case of conducting or forestalling Society business is difficult to justify in light of the written rules of the Society. Such cases include the indefinite deferral of statements on Fabian policy ("in view of the election results");³⁴ failure to print Tracts previously voted and approved for publication by the membership ("due to impact on finances");³⁵ the formation of a Fabian Book Club (in which the Executive "issues and will issue all

rules and regulations as needed");³⁶ and the discontinuation of correspondence courses in 1900 ("the Executive sensibly deciding, as it did on some other occasions, that there was no point in the Fabian Society trying to do what other organizations could do more effectively").³⁷

Another important aspect of Executive activity concentrated on the organization and administration of the Society so as to allow the utilization of personalities and events to the best advantage for the Society's image and efficiency. To this end, the Executive frequently defined the direction and emphasis of the Society's work through the control of information, publications, member behavior, and outside contacts and interface. Given the propensity of the leadership for publishing, editing, and writing, it seems only natural that the control of the Society's Tracts, manifestos, publications, and internal communications would represent a prime target for Executive control.

Before 1890, the Society did little in the field of publishing other than the Essays. Up to that time, the Fabian Society had only ten Tracts in circulation (all written by members of the Executive) and had little influence with the press or local government officials.

By the early 1890s, however, certain members of the Society outside the Executive were submitting Tracts for publication. During this period the Fabian News was founded, and the solicitation by the Society's leadership of editorial and feature space in the local press was beginning to bear some fruit. It is from this period as well that the Executive appears to have taken some steps to oversee the Society's publishing functions in some detail, especially as they related to the dissemination of information and expression of opinion which has been represented as Fabian in nature. While Tracts were frequently discussed at members' meetings, it is apparent that the Executive, or at least a portion thereof, organized editorial control and procedural maneuvers which effectively undermined the exposition of membership opinion unfiltered by the Society's leadership. From late 1890 a trend emerges which culminated some ten years later in attempts to by-pass membership participation in publications altogether. The first issue surfaced in an Executive meeting of 1890 to which the general membership was not privy. Here it was reported that a "list of books for publication was presented by Secretary and handed to Shaw to send round sundry Executive members."³⁸ While membership interest in Executive Committee and

general Society business prompted the formation of the Fabian News a few months later, control of this organ too was effectively and continually retained by the Executive through control of the News' editorial content and policy.³⁹

The Executive oversaw the publication of periodic reports as well, the most notable example being the revision of the Annual Reports of the Society. So pervasive was the Executive's role in these documents that it reviewed and "corrected" portions of the Reports after approval of their contents by the general membership, but before publication.⁴⁰ The supervision of irregular publications, most frequently those taking the form of Tracts and manifestos, was ostensibly conducted by the Publication Committee. This committee included members of the Executive Committee but was also open officially to the general membership upon application to and approval by the Executive Committee. Nevertheless, when the workload or expediency demanded, it was not uncommon for the Executive to distribute at least a portion of the requisite duties of this Committee amongst themselves.⁴¹ More frequently it was the policy of the Executive to bypass the committee process entirely and act on its own authority in the matter of special

publications. This action was taken in the case of Tracts,⁴² reading lists for the membership at large,⁴³ and the Society's manifestos.⁴⁴ A similar situation existed in the organization of lectures and the lecture circuit where although there was a Lecture Committee established purportedly to coordinate that aspect of the Society's activities, its actual duties were frequently usurped by the Executive.⁴⁵

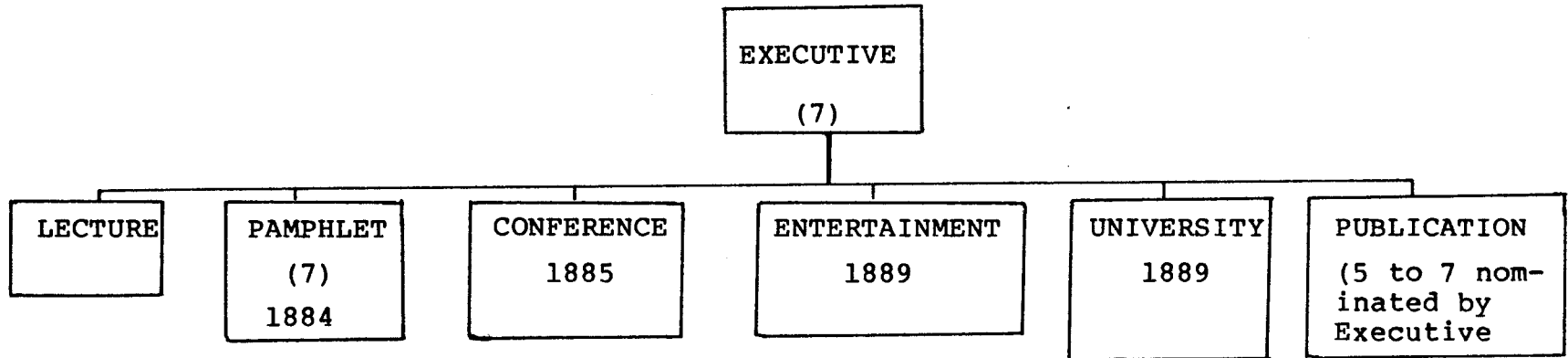
The third area in which the Executive participated was in that of outside contact and interface. As guardians of the Fabian Gospel from the time of the foundation of the Society in 1884, it was, perhaps, only natural that the Executive leadership was most concerned about potential dangers to the Society's goals and integrity from uncoordinated interaction between the Society's representatives and the representatives of competing and frequently hostile factions struggling for supremacy in the political and social turbulence of the 1890s. That virtually all of the Society's delegates to outside functions during this period were Executive members was previously noted. Equally enlightening is the fact that during the course of the 1890s the Executive effectively blocked communication between groups and causes considered

undesirable by the Executive, and the Fabian membership.⁴⁶ Even in cases where contact was considered desirable, the Executive carefully engineered official plans and actions so as to solicit minimal involvement from the membership on either the planning or operating levels.⁴⁷ As Webb succinctly put it, summarizing the rippling discontent with the Executive's unilateral decision to withdraw from the Socialist Joint Committee, "it does not matter all that much what is decided about the Joint Committee. Neither Shaw nor you nor I will go on it."⁴⁸

While Webb's attitude served to explain privately how he felt about the usefulness of outside committees, the Old Gang certainly realized that the existence of committees within the Fabian Society served a useful purpose for the consolidation of Executive control. As previously noted, the Executive made use of committees as a matter of convenience: they were useful in the fulfillment of tasks of drudgery, and were easily circumvented in cases which required expedient or uncontested action. The proliferation of committees after 1890 (see Charts I and II accompanying) also served to ventilate hostilities and dissipate dissent while the business of decision-making was reserved to

CHART I

Fabian Society Executive and Committee Organization Prior to 1890*

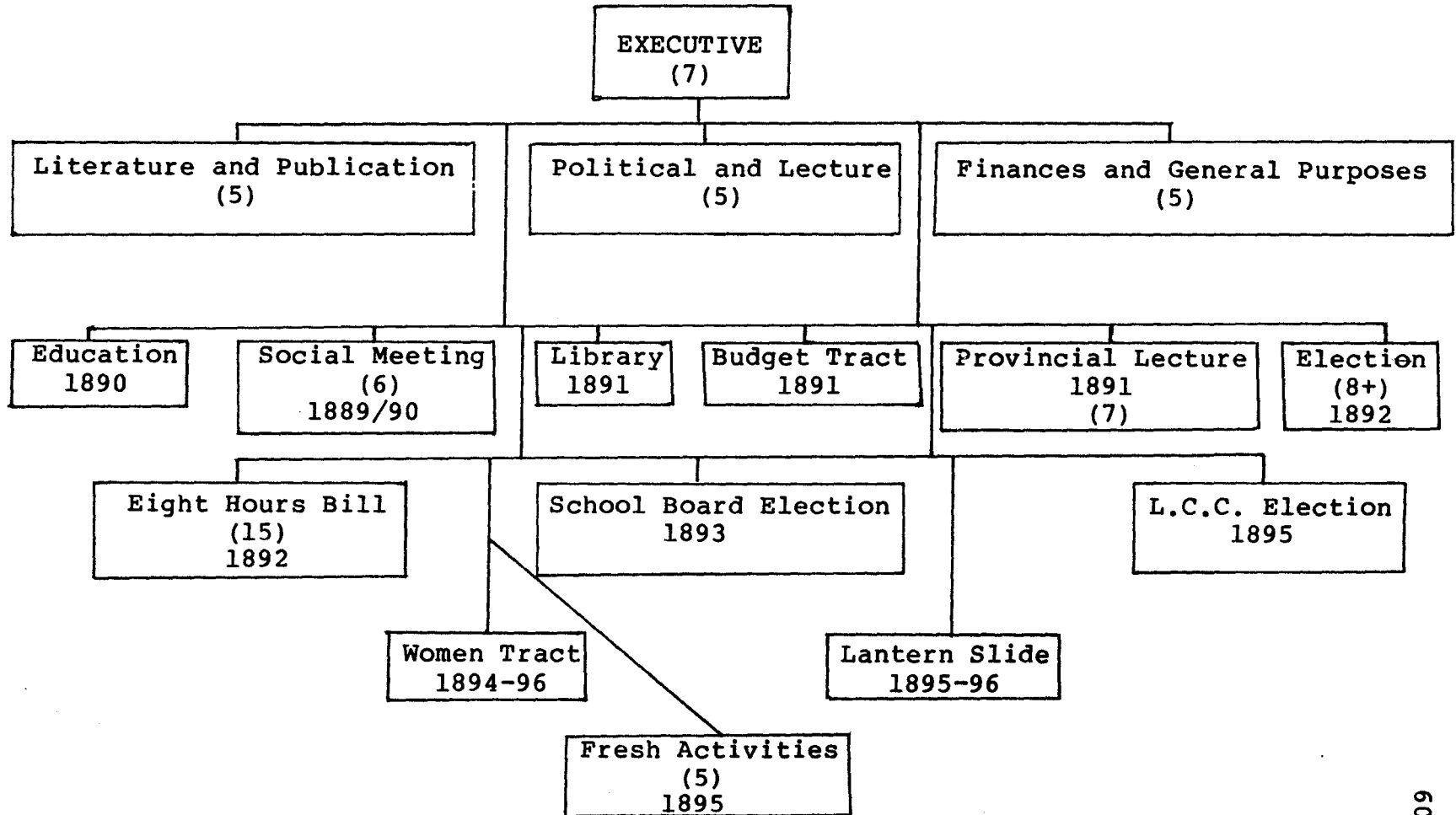


- Rules of April 16, 1886 governing establishment of committees specified that nominations were to be sent to the Secretary ten days before Executive meeting for election of committee members.
- Specific duties of the Executive were first promulgated in a meeting of September 4, 1885 where the Executive had proposed and had carried the rule "That it be the duty of the Executive Committee from time to time to write, or cause to be written pamphlets, tracts, etc., and submit them to the Society in accordance with Rule."

* Figures in parentheses indicate number of Society members on committee.

CHART II

Fabian Society Executive and Committee Organization From 1890*



*Figures in parentheses indicate number of members on committee.

"committees for special purposes," committees which were captives of the Executive Committee (such as the Book Box Committee, which was actually a sub-committee of the Fresh Activities Committee, and the Political Committee), and the Executive Committee itself.

While there is little doubt that the Executive Committee of the Fabian Society influenced the activities and direction of the group to a great extent, there is no evidence to support any accusation that financial motives were involved in the issue of Executive control (a possible exception being the case of the Hutchinson Trust). Nevertheless, rewards, such as they were, were distributed to the faithful while obstructionists were ostracized or ignored. Given the absence of political and financial pork barrels in the Fabian Society, lesser devices were utilized to reward those who supported the Executive majority. The two devices used primarily from the 1890s were association and access to free literature. As for the former, use was made of weekends in the country, special dinners and receptions, and social events involving leading Fabians who supported the Executive's authority and policy, contributed large sums of money, or, in some manner, otherwise furthered the cause of the Fabian Society in a cooperative manner.⁴⁹

Frequently, as a reward for cooperation, committees would be invited to dine at the home of an Executive member.⁵⁰

In other cases parties would be held, some members specifically being listed as "not asked" with the approval of the Executive before the fact.⁵¹ In still other instances, the elect would be invited to attend special receptions held in honor of visiting notables such as Liebknecht or Seddon, the Premier of New Zealand.⁵²

The other badge of honor, acceptance, and influence--access to free literature--was a preserve of the Executive, especially when it came to the distribution of tracts and essays. It was these publications that were the most expensive for the Society to publish. Leaflets and pamphlets, by comparison, were printed and distributed, mostly free of charge, by the thousands. Before the 1890s, the issuance of tracts and essays on a no charge basis was only assured to such prestigious and influential institutions as the Cambridge University Library, the Bodleian, Advocates, Guildhall, and Trinity.⁵³ Peripheral and antithetical groups, such as the Irish National Union, were flatly refused.⁵⁴ Marginal organizations were sometimes given grants of literature, but not without heated debate, the granting

of literature on a no charge basis usually implying the approval of the recipients' views by the Fabian Executive or the Society as a whole. In the case of the Ethical Society's Student Library, for example, only "after prolonged debate, was it decided to grant a copy [of] Fabian Essays ."55 In another case, however, an entire set of Tracts was granted, without debate, to an "unknown Russian," solely upon the recommendation of Graham Wallas.⁵⁶ Pease's access to free literature was practically unlimited, at least until 1892 when it was "agreed that Secretary decline to grant tracts in future without consulting Executive--unless in special cases."⁵⁷

Although most of the information available on the Executive Committee of the Fabian Society is currently available only in manuscript form, perusal of the manuscript sources reveals instances of Executive control more extensive than any documented to date. Not only did the Executive control the membership, organizational structure, and information flow of the Society, but they appear to have done so throughout all levels of the organization. The nature of that control bordered on the coercive in some cases, but always with the tacit approval or consent of the majority of the membership. Contrary to the accounts of the Fabian historians

especially, however, this control was not exercised with unanimity on the part of the membership, or even the Executive itself. In the following chapter, an attempt is made to further analyze the Executive power structure through a study of membership and Executive interaction, the incidence and nature of conflict within the Society and the Executive, and the methods and success of those conflicts' resolutions.

FOOTNOTES

¹See Chapter II above, pp. 20-22.

²Executive Committee Minutes were recorded regularly on a fortnightly basis. Hobson, in eulogizing the Old Gang, makes specific reference to weekly Executive Meetings, the proceedings of which appear neither to have survived nor been recorded. Committees and sub-committees met in some cases up to several times a week, depending upon the urgency of business before them.

³Unfortunately, the only gap in the minutes and proceedings of the Fabian Society falls during the period when the Basis was adopted during the late 1880s.

⁴The resolution, proposed by Bland, was brought before the Executive Committee Meeting of May 21, 1886 where it was approved.

⁵Executive Minute Books, April 14, 1891. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁶"The Fabian Society," printed circular (London: The Fabian Society, [January, 1891]), 4 pp.

⁷Executive Minute Books, December 8, 1891. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford; Fabian News, January, 1892. The News noted that those proposing and

seconding candidates for membership must write letters stating from personal knowledge that individual candidates were eligible to join the Society. The Executive, however, excused itself from this rule in at least one case (See Executive Minutes, September 6, 1895: "Walter J. Reed. Standring reported that he had not seen him but that he had discovered that he was an official in the Paris Y.M.C.A. Agreed to elect him.").

⁸The figures used were drawn from the Fabian News and Executive Minute Books which recorded the details and disposition of each proposal. For details, see Chapter VI below.

⁹The proposal was later modified to read that the 5s would be refunded in the event that the proposed individual were not elected (see Fabian News, III(2), April, 1893).

¹⁰Reported in Fabian News, III(3), May, 1893.

¹¹See Executive Minute Books, January 20, 1893 and January 30, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹²Executive Minute Books, March 10, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Lack of attendance was also grounds for dismissal under Rule 12 of the Society (see for example Executive Minutes of February 28, 1896). By 1900, the Executive had expanded their ruling to include "members without known addresses. The Secretary was authorized to strike out the annexed list of members at his discretion" (Executive Minutes, July 13, 1900. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford).

¹³Executive Minute Books, May 6, 1887. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹⁴Ibid., June 3, 1887.

¹⁵"The Fabian Society," printed circular (London: The Fabian Society, [January,] 1891), 4 pp.

¹⁶Executive Minute Books, March 16, 1894. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹⁷Executive Minute Books, December 18, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Even then, he

was sent with Harry Lowerison, a member of the existing Executive Committee.

¹⁸For example Wallas and Massingham (Executive Minute Books, January 12, 1892. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford); formulation of position for Joint Committee Agenda (Ibid., June 16 and June 30, 1893); Macrosty, Standring, and Martin in Executive Minutes, September 6 and 20, 1895. In Lowerison's case (Ibid., January 15, 1892), he was merely instructed to "vote with Shaw".

¹⁹Executive Minute Books, June 9, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. The Socialist Joint Committee was constituted in 1893 with representatives present from the Fabian Society, the Hammersmith Socialist Society (formerly the Socialist League), and the S.D.F. It was an effort to promote socialist unity as well as certain definite reform programs, such as the eight hour day, the prohibition of child labor, equal pay for men and women doing equal work, and universal suffrage. The group disbanded about six months after its foundation.

²⁰Fabian News, August, 1893.

²¹Executive Minute Books, July 28, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Utley and DeMattos voted against the motion.

²²Martin J. Wiener, Between Two Worlds: The Political Thought of Graham Wallas (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 22.

²³Anne Jackson Freemantle, This Little Band of Prophets: The Story of the Gentle Fabians (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), pp. 57-58.

²⁴Executive Minute Books, November 5, 1886. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶"Manifesto of the Fabian Parliamentary League," printed circular (London: February, 1887), 2pp.

²⁷Executive Minute Books, April 6, 1888. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²⁸Ibid., April and October 31, 1890.

²⁹Fabian News, April, 1893. The three-fourths majority had to be obtained not only at the Society's Annual Meeting, but also in a Members' Meeting not more than six months later. Realistically, it was rare that three-fourths of the membership attended either the Annual or Private Meetings of the Society, thereby making rule changes very difficult to achieve.

³⁰Fabian News, December, 1895.

³¹Ibid.

³²Fabian News, January, 1896.

³³Executive Minute Books, March 11, 1890. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

³⁴Ibid., October 26, 1894.

³⁵Fabian News, January, 1895.

³⁶Fabian News, April, 1899.

³⁷Cole, Story, p. 110, f.n. 1.

³⁸Executive Minute Books, November 25, 1890. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

³⁹Ibid., January 27, 1891. This session's minutes close with the notation "[N.B. The Editors subject to appeal to the Executive shall have absolute power to accept or reject.]" The Executive Minutes of February 10, 1891, while agreeing "that FN contain reports of Executive meetings," effectively restricted reports of Executive attendance figures, reports on the proposal and acceptance of members and prospective members, and the publication of work and lecture schedules. A proposed Fabian Review, dating from the Executive Committee meeting of April 28, 1891, was to round out the Society's publication schedule under the editorship of Sidney Webb and Massingham alone. The Executive's overriding control was evidenced by the decision, in 1896, that the usual report of Executive activities included in the Fabian News "be replaced only with 'Executive Notes'." The internal explanation given for this action was that the proceedings, as they

occurred, were considered "unfit" for publication in the opinion of the Executive. (Executive Minute Books, July 24, 1896. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.)

⁴⁰See Executive Minute Books, May 5, 1891. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴¹Ibid., May 26, 1891 reports a "special committee" constituted for this purpose; it was staffed by Bland, Shaw, and Wallas. A similar committee was constituted by the Executive in their meeting of July 15, 1898, Mrs. Shaw being placed in charge of the drafting procedure.

⁴²Ibid., October 16, 1896; Fabian News, September, 1891; Cole, Story, p. 58, f.n. 2 for examples. In 1899 the Executive also rushed through a Tract on the nationalization of Irish Railways, this time because of the impossibility of waiting until the next monthly meeting of the members and the reluctance of the Executive to spend the money required to call a special meeting.

⁴³Letter from Sidney Webb to Edward R. Pease, October 18, 1895. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Herein Webb reports "'What to Read,' must, I am sorry to say, stand over for some days yet. As left by Wallas and Mckillop it is quite unfit for the printer, and I must go to work at it seriously. In my view the revision has gone far to spoil it."

⁴⁴Letter from Gilbert Slates to Edward R. Pease, November 8, 1900. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. In this correspondence Slates complains that "I suggested to Webb that since by accident my proposal was issued to the world as part of a Fabian Manifesto, without any Fabian except (I believe) Shaw and Webb having any opportunity of saying a word for or against, it would now be right to submit my proposals to a meeting of members before taking any further action." Webb, in further correspondence with Pease (letter from Webb to Pease, September 11, 1900. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford), however, had warned ". . . as regards manifesto, I cannot help thinking your suggestion of dispensing with sending members proofs is not prudent. . . I would rather omit the members' meeting, explaining the possibility or rather lack of it . . . but I would certainly send out the proofs in galley slips not paged.

... " This episode illustrates not only Pease's contempt for the lengthy process of consultation with the membership at large (probably shared by Webb), but also Webb's continuing realization that the membership was the Executive Committee's ultimate source and guarantee of power. The existence of a joint manifesto on the Small Holdings Bill [1892], issued in cooperation with the English Land Restoration League and the Land Nationalization Society, was not even known to some members of the Executive itself until announced by the secretary at a meeting of the Executive Committee some time later (Executive Minute Books, April 8, 1892. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford). Two of the Society's more prominent manifestos ("To Your Tents . . ." and the manifesto on the Boer War) were substantially drafted by G.B. Shaw, who appears to have been a prime spokesman for the Society.

⁴⁵The Executive Minutes for October 20, 1893 note that Bland was to contact lecturers "with hints" as to the content of their upcoming presentations. The Executive, through its control of agenda and finances, also determined both the speakers and lecture content for public meetings, conferences, and provincial lecture circuits (Executive Minute Books, October 20, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford).

⁴⁶In a majority of cases, such actions were taken without the knowledge of the membership. In refusing to take action on the requests made by the International Labour League, the Tramway Union, and the Right of the Procession Committee correspondence was ignored (Executive Minutes, July 1, 1890). See also Executive Minutes, September 23, 1890; Executive Minutes, May 3, 1895 (refusing donations to the Hyde Park Demonstration Committee because "workmen only were wanted as speakers"); Executive Minutes, July 28, 1893 (withdrawing Fabian delegates from the Socialist Joint Committee); Executive Minutes, February 14, 1896 (ignoring invitations from the S.D.F. and International Legal Eight Hours Association for the May Day demonstration of 1896).

⁴⁷The plan for the Pan-Fabian Conference, designed to integrate the national membership of the Fabian Society, was drawn up by a special committee of DeMattos, Oakeshott, Bland, Wallas, and Pease--all Executive members--and approved by the Executive (Executive Minutes, October 27, 1891). The Labour

Program for the London County Council was detailed by Webb and Wallas (Executive Minutes, January 12, 1892); while subscriptions for I.L.P. candidates in the 1898 elections were to be secreted from the membership entirely (Executive Minutes, January 28, 1898: "No mention to be made in News").

⁴⁸Letter from Sidney Webb to Graham Wallas, September 12, 1893. Wallas Papers, The British Library of Political and Economic Science, London.

⁴⁹As in the case of the Seddon Luncheon, the Liebknecht and Bernstein visits, and the meetings of the Book Box and Special Purposes Committees.

⁵⁰Executive Minute Books, June 10, 1891. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁵¹Ibid., March 8, 1895.

⁵²The Executive minutes for July 2, 1897 noted that in the case of the latter, "the Secretary was authorized to invite prominent Fabians by letter." (Executive Minute Books, July 2, 1897. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.)

⁵³Executive Minute Books, November 11, 1890. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁵⁴Ibid., October 3, 1892.

⁵⁵Ibid., January 12, 1892.

⁵⁶Ibid., September 1, 1891.

⁵⁷Ibid., November 28, 1892.

CHAPTER IV

CONFLICT AND CONCILIATION ON THE FABIAN EXECUTIVE

There has never been a Fabian "orthodoxy" which forced exclusion on all who did not accept it in detail. . . . This is undoubtedly one of the main reasons for the cohesion of the Society and its freedom from splits, the only sizable walk-out having been the resignation of Ramsey MacDonald and something under twenty others--out of 800--over the refusal of the Society, on a postal vote, to issue a public pronouncement on the South African War.¹

This is the general impression one gains of the extent of Fabian discord when reading most of the published literature on the Fabian Society. Perhaps Pease and Cole in particular were still speaking on behalf of the Old Gang when they first published their works in 1913 and 1961 respectively. While it would seem illogical to suppose that groups composed of human individuals could ever function without discord, Pease elsewhere confined his knowledge of splits of any kind in the Fabian Society to a "few" at most, all with insignificant impact on the operation or direction of the group.² It would be misleading as well to suppose that routine differences on

matters of policy reflect personal or political conflict among the Executive Committee or the membership at large. There are copious examples of policy conflicts in most groups which are politically oriented and the Fabian Society proves to be no exception. From the early days of the Society's operations, the question of Tory Gold caused many socialists including the Fabians to choose sides in questioning the discretion of both the Tories and the S.D.F.³ Similarly, dissention among the Executive and the Fabian Group Secretaries broke out in 1892 over the question of permeation and its usefulness as a tactic in achieving political power.⁴ Tempers flared on policy matters later in the 1890s as well when a proposal was made to subscribe to the Queen's Jubilee Decoration Committee. In this case, the Executive wisely decided to "bow to [the] membership."⁵

There are other instances of dissatisfaction which raise the question of Executive or leadership propriety, such as J.R. MacDonald's accusation against the Webbs of abusing Hutchinson Trust monies.⁶ An analysis of hitherto unexplored areas of conflict reduced non-policy oriented discontent to two areas: examples of conflict between members of the Society at large and the Executive; and examples of conflict among members of the Executive Committee itself. As might be

expected, incidents of Executive conflict were not aired before the membership at large or revealed to other outside sources. Even the Executive proceedings themselves mask much of the intrigue which probably transpired during the entrenchment of an identifiable leadership on the Fabian Executive. Nevertheless, the minutes of 1887 identify Bolas, a member of the Executive, as protesting that the Executive as a whole, and the Secretary [Pease] in particular, had "a discouraging ego effect on the rest of the Society."⁷ The ramifications of this observation are open to interpretation as are Bolas' subsequent remarks which, according to Secretary Pease, constituted "libel on Executive and Webb."⁸ Other Executive members, however, expressed similar concerns, some in more specific terms than Bolas'. Even Bland, usually a supporter of Old Gang assertions, cautioned Webb privately that "there is abroad a rather wide spread impression that the Society is managed by . . . Webb, Olivier, Shaw, and Wallas."⁹ Elsewhere in the Society's minutes, Mrs. Sandham, a prominent woman Fabian and Executive member, proposed a resolution urging the Executive to work more harmoniously with the S.D.F. in view of members' sentiment about organized Socialist activity. In this case, the motion was relegated to the Executive for consideration before

"sending to printer."¹⁰ Its ultimate disposition is unknown, but the Fabian Society remained hostile to the S.D.F. throughout the period under investigation.

While passing comments concerning the relationship of the Executive and the membership are sparse, examples of conflict among members of the Executive are nonexistent in summary form in the proceedings of the Society or its publications. Pease noted in one aside that

In his autobiography, H.G. Wells describes how in his time, about 1908, the Executive Committee was dominated by a feud between Bland and myself partly because Bland wanted to be paid secretary in my stead. . . . All he [Bland] ever did for the twenty years in my time was to sign as many blank cheques as I asked for. He never looked at the accounts. There was no feud between Bland and the rest of us. He was a sound Socialist, but otherwise a Tory, and the rest of us were born Liberals. He was a little different, and a little of an outsider, but that is all there was to it.¹¹

Admittedly Pease drew criticism for such forgivable acts as the unauthorized distribution of literature and Tracts, but censure was not a practical solution to problems which were not officially admitted. One develops a growing suspicion into the 1890s, however, that all was not well on the Executive Committee itself. In the matter of permeation, for example, discussions of this strategy led to dissident suggestions for the reorganization of the Society and the rethinking of its

objectives as well as its methods (in open defiance of Sidney Webb). The Executive rallied to Webb, however, and opposed the motions to abandon permeation. In the final vote, the Executive carried the rejection of change by a vote of 52 to 33 at a members' meeting. Following this defeat, Robert Banner, an Executive member, resigned to make room for a "more agreeable" member on the Executive. Resignations were also received after the publication of the Fabian Manifesto in 1893 and following the sex and free love scandals involving the Executive lecturer DeMattos earlier in 1892. By 1894, E.E. Williams had also resigned from the Executive "to make room for a more harmonious member."¹² In his departure he was joined by the eccentric but respected Dr. Stewart Headlam who had confided to Pease: "G.B.S. has given me a good excuse for not standing again for the Executive. So please do not put my name forward."¹³

A good accounting of some of the issues at stake is to be found in the correspondence of J. Ramsay MacDonald which details reactions to and concerns with the nature and significance of Executive disagreements. Fumed MacDonald:

You are altogether out of touch with anything but London Socialism which, I can assure you, is about as sickly now compared with provincial robustness as London life itself is. I think the [Hutchinson]

Trustees should throw themselves more open to provincial influences--still of course keeping absolute control, and that would be done in a small way by keeping your work more in touch with the Executive. . . . I do not think that the existing lines of work will save the Trustees from coming into conflict with at least a section of the Executive and perhaps of the Society sooner or later. . . .¹⁴

MacDonald's concern was compounded that summer following Executive attempts to control the course and outcome of members' meetings in a manner more heavy-handed than had been previously used. The manner and determination of Executive efforts to control such events so annoyed MacDonald that he moved, during an Executive discussion, "that in the opinion of the Executive it is unbecoming for individual members of the Executive to attempt to influence the opinion of meetings of members by the issue of Whips."¹⁵ Although MacDonald withdrew the motion after his point had been made, the situation continued unresolved. The Daily Chronicle reported some three months later that

For some little time past a few members of the Fabian Society have been much excited in their minds about the issuing of a certain tract by the Executive of the Society. The tract in question has certain special features which make it eminently distasteful to this section of the society, since it is distinguished by a tone of vigorous common sense toward socialist policy. An urgent Whip was accordingly issued to those members who, it was thought, would support the malcontents in the furious onslaught they proposed to make upon the executive. The battle was waged last night at a meeting of the society . . . when Mr. J.R. MacDonald was spokesman

for the malcontents and Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. Sidney Webb appeared in defense of the tract, the issue of which was approved by 168 votes to 33.¹⁶

While it is apparent that conflict was ongoing from at least the mid or late 1880s through the 1890s both among Executive members and between the Executive (or a faction thereof) and at least a portion of the Society's membership, the depth to which feelings ran, and the significance of such conflict, can best be illustrated by three separate instances of disagreements which clearly went beyond matters of policy or administrative detail: committee usage (as seen especially in the Women's Tract Committee); the Runciman Affair; and the delicate issue of the Transvaal Question.

The control of committees, as has been noted, was an effective means by which the Executive could control both Fabian activities (by establishing or terminating the very existence of committees) and philosophical directions (through assignment of committee members or the modification of committee charters). The subservience of committees to the Executive was documented first by Annie Besant in 1890, querying Pease, "can a committee alter a decision of the Executive?"¹⁷ Their existence as a battleground for aggressive Executive and Society members, however, is hidden once again in the Minute Books of the Executive Committee and in various

collections of personal correspondence.¹⁸ One illustration of such committee and membership/Executive disagreements involved the Executive's infamous "committees for special purposes" which have been shown to be vehicles through which the Executive engineered particularly delicate or important programs. In protesting just such actions, J.R. MacDonald confided to Pease his experience of finding that the Book Box Committee had engaged in discussions concerning the Hutchinson Trust, including the proposed composition of the Trust's Board of Trustees and the ultimate use of the Trust's considerable liquid assets. In a heated letter MacDonald lamented that the committee originally constituted to handle the Hutchinson Trust bequest (the Hutchinson Trust Grant Committee) had never met. It was his feeling, therefore, that the Executive could not make any decisions regarding Hutchinson Trust monies because a properly delegated and constituted committee had yet to convene and offer its suggestions. The essence of MacDonald's complaint was that he had requested to join the Hutchinson Trust Grant Committee, but had declined joining the menial Book Box Committee for lack of time. When MacDonald first suspected that the Book Box Committee was discussing Hutchinson Trust affairs, he wrote to Pease requesting specific information as to

which committees were being summoned for discussion of events during one particular week. Pease responded by sending MacDonald a notice of Book Box Committee activities and no other. Upon learning that the Book Box Committee (chaired by Sidney Webb) had, in fact, discussed the disposition of Hutchinson Trust funds, MacDonald wrote to Pease complaining that

If the convenience of any one member is to dominate the Society and its work, we had better understand so now, and I will resign my membership at once. . . . There is too much of this private consultation going on and rearranging of Executive decisions. . . . If you summon a Hutchinson Trust Committee after the ordinary consultation as to free hours I will attend. If not, I will not attend, because in doing so I am going against the intention of the Executive in appointing a specially small committee to investigate the matters.¹⁹

While the matter of special committees became a matter of increasing concern to those such as MacDonald in the mid and latter 1890s, the first documented example of their detailed operation was bared by Emma Brooke in her motion of December 15, 1893

To add a new rule:

Committees: Committees for special purposes shall be appointed by the Executive Committee, but notice of such committees (exclusive of those dealing with purely executive business), shall be published beforehand in the FABIAN NEWS, or at private meetings, in order that any member desirous to serve on such committees shall have the opportunity of sending in his or her name for consideration by the Executive.²⁰

While Miss Brooke's motion was carried only after a

protracted debate, the spirit of the motion appears to have died by the following spring when she was refused membership on the Women's Tract Committee which at that time was processing literature under the tutelage of Mesdames Shaw and Webb. Brooke's reaction was summarized in the following excerpt from a letter to Pease:

I have gathered that the Executive Collectively is almost as powerless as the Society at large, that the sole resource of members sturdily resistant to the close spirit of domination amongst one or two, is to make a row and then to resign. . . . Now I wish to mention the fact that drew my attention to this irregularity.

I asked Mr. Shaw whether I could join the committee on the Woman's Tract: I made this request twice over. His reply on the first occasion was "I don't mind"; on the second it was more singular. "I believe," he said, "that you want to join merely to improve acquaintance with Mrs. Sidney Webb." . . . It seems to me that what we are nearing as far as the Fabian Executive goes, is a Despotism of Mr. Shaw [and] a growing spirit of narrow domination in the Fabian Executive.²¹

The charges of committee domination by the Executive and its allies contained in the above letter were denied by the Executive with some internal division when they convened on the same evening. Nevertheless, although the Secretary was instructed to inform Miss Brooke that she was "out of order, as being in conflict with the existing rules," they were willing "now to appoint her a member of that committee."²²

Although protests against special committees continued, Emma Brooke's victory remained incomplete.

The Fabian News of May, 1894 included an article reporting that she desired to keep the Executive from appointing such committees. This article was followed, however, by a resolution to be considered at the annual meeting proposing that "Committees for special purposes shall be appointed by the Executive Committee. . . ."23

The following month's News reported that such a motion was indeed passed by the membership at the annual meeting.²⁴ During this period the Executive, prompted by Sidney Webb, turned increasingly more attention to the collection of facts and funds, the publication of statistics and catechisms, and other methods of improving the educational services of the Society. This turning of the mid 1890s brought some measurably tenser opposition to the Fabian Executive as the increasingly scholarly and administratively oriented leadership of the Society continued to dodge the issues of an independent labor party, women's rights, and foreign affairs. J.R. MacDonald was not isolated in his concern when he lamented

I am in some doubt as to whether it is worth while remaining on the Executive . It seems as if the Society had made up its mind to stick where it is, and instead of pioneering is becoming so wise that it can do nothing. I am very far from being a keen woman's "rightist," but I think that the way in which the woman's tract was handled was shameful. In other ways in my opinion the Society is losing opportunities. When one joins such an Exec., it is not to make it work and it is not worth while trying

to force things upon it. . . . You are altogether out of touch. . . . If I happen to be elected this year I will serve more for the purpose of watching developments than from any hope that the Society is going to do much useful work.²⁵

The matter was still of import to MacDonald when he renewed his objections only four months later:

It is really no good your trying to run mysteries into our determination to do business stage by stage. . . . I must honestly confess that one or two things which the Executive (directly or indirectly) have been responsible for recently have led me to somewhat distrust some of the members. The fate of the Women's Tract is a case in point.

I regret exceedingly the refusal of the Executive to publish the scheme. It could have been done in quite a tentative way by simply stating that we thought something of the kind might be done but that we did not perhaps stick together to the precise details.²⁶

MacDonald's concern on this occasion was that the Society was stultifying and should appeal to the membership for financial support and new ideas. At the same time, MacDonald saw this as an opportunity to reassure the membership that a new vitality was being developed. He identified a lack of such actions as discussing new work with the membership and asking for their suggestions as being the principle cause of the Society's decline in income. "Do work and we shall get money," he admonished. "But play the farce heavily of 'so superior persons' and we shall have to shut up shop in no time."²⁷

While the issue of old committees involved

members of the Executive Committee primarily, the incident of the Runciman Affair, recorded in the correspondence and Minutes of Executive and London Group meetings, represents an instance in which conflict extended beyond the Executive, or even the core of the London Society, to one of the subordinate London Groups. The Runciman incident was concerned with events in late 1891 although repercussions continued for at least two years. Of the published sources on Fabianism, only the MacKenzie's study makes mention of Runciman, characterizing him as "a truculent member . . . who was always suspecting the Society's leaders of backsliding and corrupt self interest."²⁸

This interpretation, in the MacKenzie's analysis, stemmed from a ludicrous allegation "that Webb was compromising with the Liberals and had exhibited complacency in the sweating of employees of the A.B.C. catering chain".²⁹ The incident first developed, however, not as an irrational personal attack against Webb on the A.B.C. matter, but as a general complaint by J.F. Runciman against "the cuteness of the Executive in handling its members' affairs."³⁰ The content of Runciman's letter, specific in nature, was used by the Executive to substantiate an apology on Runciman's part without full disclosure of the letter's contents to the

membership. The text of the letter seems hardly an polite apology, however, reading in part

I am sorry I called the Executive stupid. It was a mistake. From what I see of DeMattos' gambling so-called stock exchange operations, of his practically living on the F.S. when away lecturing, of Webb's determination to get into Parliament, and violent endeavor of nearly all the rest to do well for themselves I see that they're not stupid but mighty cute. I have been patiently doing routine work sending out everlasting notices, giving myself no end of trouble to arrange this meeting and that, and spending what money I could afford, under the erroneous impression that we were all working for one cause. Now I see that the humble work of we obscure Fabians is merely to raise the "big shots" on our shoulders. I agree with the Executive that it would be a waste of time and money to spend on lecture here. It would do little good--for Webb or Shaw or the rest of you--it would only socialize the place to a great extent. But there is little hope of a Socialist member being returned this century; much better to spend the money in more hopeful constituencies. Noble self-sacrificing men we all are. . . .³¹

Following the Executive's official reaction to Runciman's outburst, threatening him with loss of membership in the face of continuing accusations, Runciman once again expressed his displeasure with the state of affairs as he saw them.

Have you all forgotten that at a tract discussion at Barnard's Inn, Olivier somehow avoided putting any of our advanced suggestions to the meeting, and that when we carried one your secretary rose and significantly said that he might have to cut that out to "improve the appearance of the tract"? . . . Everything tends to prove the justice of our suspicions; may we not express them?--are we children to be slapped when we disobey our good mammas and papas the Executive?³²

At the following Executive meeting, the voice of Olaf Block, who was a friend of Webb and whose wife was acquainted with Pease, was added to Runciman's in complaining of the Executive's unexplained hesitation in bringing the A.B.C. matter onto the agenda of the embittered meeting of November 20, 1891.³³ The confrontation prompted an unusual reaction in the Executive which consequently met at an interval of one week versus the usual two week period to compose the following resolution to Runciman:

That the Executive desire to draw the serious attention of J.F. Runciman to the circular sent by him to members of the Society accusing Sidney Webb of dishonourable conduct and to the explanations sent him by the order of the Executive, and they desire to know what steps J.F. Runciman now proposes to take.³⁴

This speedy and calculated response on the part of the Executive lends credence to the hypothesis that the matters which the Executive had under consideration relative to Runciman were not to counter Runciman's delusions, or, as the MacKenzies allege, to discredit the ravings of a laughable eccentric.³⁵

At least two responses were received by the Executive from Runciman. One was labeled by the Executive as "unsuitable" for inclusion in the News (and was thereby withheld from the membership). The other was reportedly "not read, burned at his request."³⁶ The

circular in question which originated with the Southern Group (of which Runciman was Secretary) had specifically announced a special meeting of that Group and invited all Group Secretaries in the London area to attend or send representatives to consider the following resolution:

That this meeting strongly disapproves of the dishonourable trick by which Sidney Webb prevented a resolution being put to the general Fabian meeting on November 20th, and calls upon Webb to explain and clear himself of the suspicion of being directly or indirectly interested in the sweating of the A.B.C. employees.³⁷

The Executive took their cue from this circular, inviting Runciman to a special members' meeting to be held later that month. This meeting was to be charged with precisely those questions raised by Runciman's Group. The Executive, in a series of lengthy strategy meetings, established the order of business at the special meeting, the path to be taken in confronting Runciman, the Executive members' role in the business meeting and discussion, and especially "that no special action be taken in respect to the A.B.C. resolution on the agenda on Friday December 11th."³⁸ Shaw was charged with organizing a selection of Runicman's correspondence which was deemed suitable for public consumption; it contained a coda charging loyal Executive defenders to "conduct the case on behalf of the Exec.,"³⁹ to arrange for a motion to be made "approv [ing] the action of Sidney Webb in the

chair on November 20th" and claiming ignorance of "any injustice for the resolution passed by the members of the Southern Group."⁴⁰ The full details of this Executive orchestration were revealed a fortnight later when Griffith, appointed to chair the members' meeting, allowed Shaw to make a motion on behalf of the Executive (the Runciman affair being the only printed item on the agenda by the Executive). A vote was taken, Webb vindicated on a subsequent motion, and Runciman condemned.⁴¹ This victory was reported in the Fabian News under the assumption that its circulation to the membership at large would forestall further action against Webb or the Executive by the Runciman faction. An unexpected reaction followed from the Southern Group, however, taking the form of a circular which passed through the southern part of London. In this rebuttal, the Southern Group stated that the report appearing in the Fabian News was "misleading" and did not accurately portray the informal private meeting held by the main London Group. According to the circular, the Secretary of the Southern Group requested the Executive to note a protest on the part of the Southern Group which the Executive, predictably, refused to do. The Southern Group then proceeded to render its own account of the meeting and circulated it in their Group circular. The

Group's report of the incident stressed the fact that although there were numerous supporters of the Southern Group at the Fabian members' meeting, Runciman's communication to the Executive to the effect that he would be absent from that meeting was not relayed to the membership, consisting at that particular meeting of about sixty members. The Executive was also attacked for reading communications at the meeting which were labeled as strictly private, and, therefore, not to be divulged; they were read, moreover, with Runciman's replies deleted. Concerning the vote of censure against Runciman, the circular reported from first hand information that the vote was passed by only a margin of four. The impact of this outcome becomes more striking when one learns from the Southern Group's account that Runciman specifically forbade any of those friendly to him from participating in any voting which may occur at such a meeting.⁴²

Another example of "276 Strand's methods" was recounted as well. In this case, the complaint concerns the nomination of Mrs. Lucy Henderson, a socialist, for membership in the Fabian Society. The problem, it seems, was that Mrs. Henderson was nominated by Runciman and Williams. Twice Runciman was required to "state in

writing" that Mrs. Henderson was a socialist and twice Runciman replied (in writing) that she was, "and a good one." On the day the Southern Group's circular was being prepared for printing, another request was received from the Executive requesting Runciman to "state in writing, etc., etc."⁴³

The protests of Runciman and others of the Southern Group especially notwithstanding, the Executive authorized publication in the January issue of Fabian News a report stating that December's private meeting was "unanimous" in the censure of J.F. Runciman with "many members not voting either way."⁴⁴ It was summarily stated at the same time that the A.B.C. boycott question would have to be "referred" after all because of the Executive's informal opinion that action against A.B.C. would drive business to companies that treated their employees even worse than did A.B.C., and, further, that such an action may leave the officers of the Fabian Society open to criminal charges.⁴⁵

Against the News and the influence of the Executive with the membership at large the Southern Group and Runciman had little chance of success. Runciman's bitterness lingered on, a flurry of correspondence being exchanged in mid-1893 accusing Pease in one instance of

"mistaking yourself for the Society."⁴⁶ His protests were of no avail, however, and the Executive ultimately decided to remove this "problem" through relegation of his name to the "purge list."⁴⁷

As with previous differences the Runciman affair was successfully resolved by turning to the membership for support. Bland had advised Webb on this tactic as early as 1890, confiding that it was better to let the opposition rant and turn to the membership.

If they do, and get beaten, they will subside--but if they don't they will always feel that the Executive has acted arbitrarily, and then there will be trouble.⁴⁸

Such an approach worked well in buttressing the Executive's decision to withdraw from the Socialist Joint Committee,⁴⁹ in supporting the Executive's Fortnightly Review Manifesto,⁵⁰ in retaining committees for special purposes,⁵¹ and in the issue of subscribing to the Queen's Jubilee.⁵² Even beyond the issue of Imperialism, retention of membership support was considered a prime means of retaining Executive control.

I think it is rather important that we--that is the Executive of the Fabian Society--should not put ourselves in the wrong with the Reform Committee; and I am afraid that is what we shall do if we're not careful. I was chairman of the Executive the day we ruled their motion out of order on the ground of public policy; and although it was a strong step, I thought, and said, that the whole society would have full opportunity to override us if they thought fit.

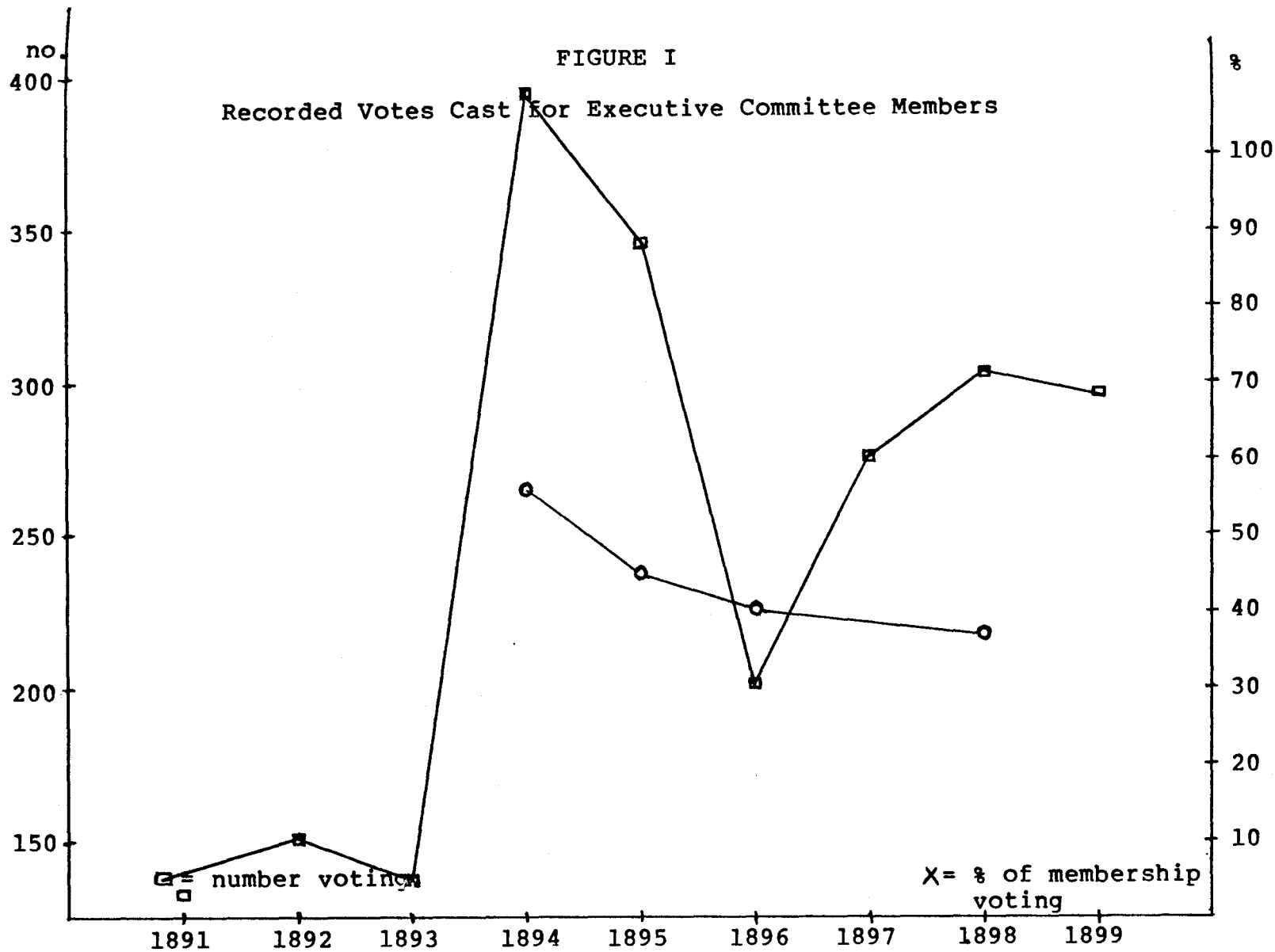
. . . It is now proposed not to let them bring their votes of censure in the form they want. This is a great mistake tactically, as well as an injustice. Let them bring up anything they like, and we can fight it and win: but if the society gets the idea that we are trying to cover ourselves, we may be beaten.⁵³

Such was the keystone of Executive control.

Two supplementary methods of resolving conflict were also used with a great deal of success: "clout," and abandonment. The latter of these two methods was used when a deadlock occurred or appeared likely, for example in the case of the Education Bill debates of 1896 when it was agreed among the Executive "that in view of the wide divergence among the Executive it was useless to attempt to make any pronouncement on the subject."⁵⁴ The use of clout was more discretely exercised, consisting of the previously discussed devices of the interpretation of rules, constitution of committees, and control of agenda.⁵⁵ Opposition recourse to tactics such as these was clear: acquiescence or resignation. Thus Executive and Society members such as E.E. Williams, J.R. MacDonald and his wife, and even Olivier and Wallas came and went while the Executive's prime movers--Webb, Shaw, and sometimes Pease--remained, led, and controlled.

The Imperialism issue provides yet another example of conflict within the ranks of both the

Executive and the Society which had a permanent and significant effect on the direction of the Society and its relevance to the political setting of late Victorian England. To Pease, the conflict involving the Boers and British interests in South Africa was another example of a policy question alone, such a conflict serving merely as a "predicture of socialist fights in general before the First World War."⁵⁶ Given the progress of events during the late 1890s, however, it is possible that the Imperialism Question precipitated a cleavage which was never effectively resolved or healed as had been the case on all previous occasions. Signs of strain became evident in the course of 1897, which appears to be a pivotal year in the Society's growth and organization. For it is during this time that the Executive, mindful of their power base with the membership, expressed increasingly greater concern with the problem of apathy among the members.⁵⁷ Besides a lack of interest in the Society's educational forums and group activities, interest in the electoral process itself showed signs of weakening. From a high point in 1894 (the time of the initiation of postal ballots), both total votes cast in Executive elections and votes cast as a percentage of total membership had been falling steadily.⁵⁸ After 1896, attendance at meetings of the membership had also

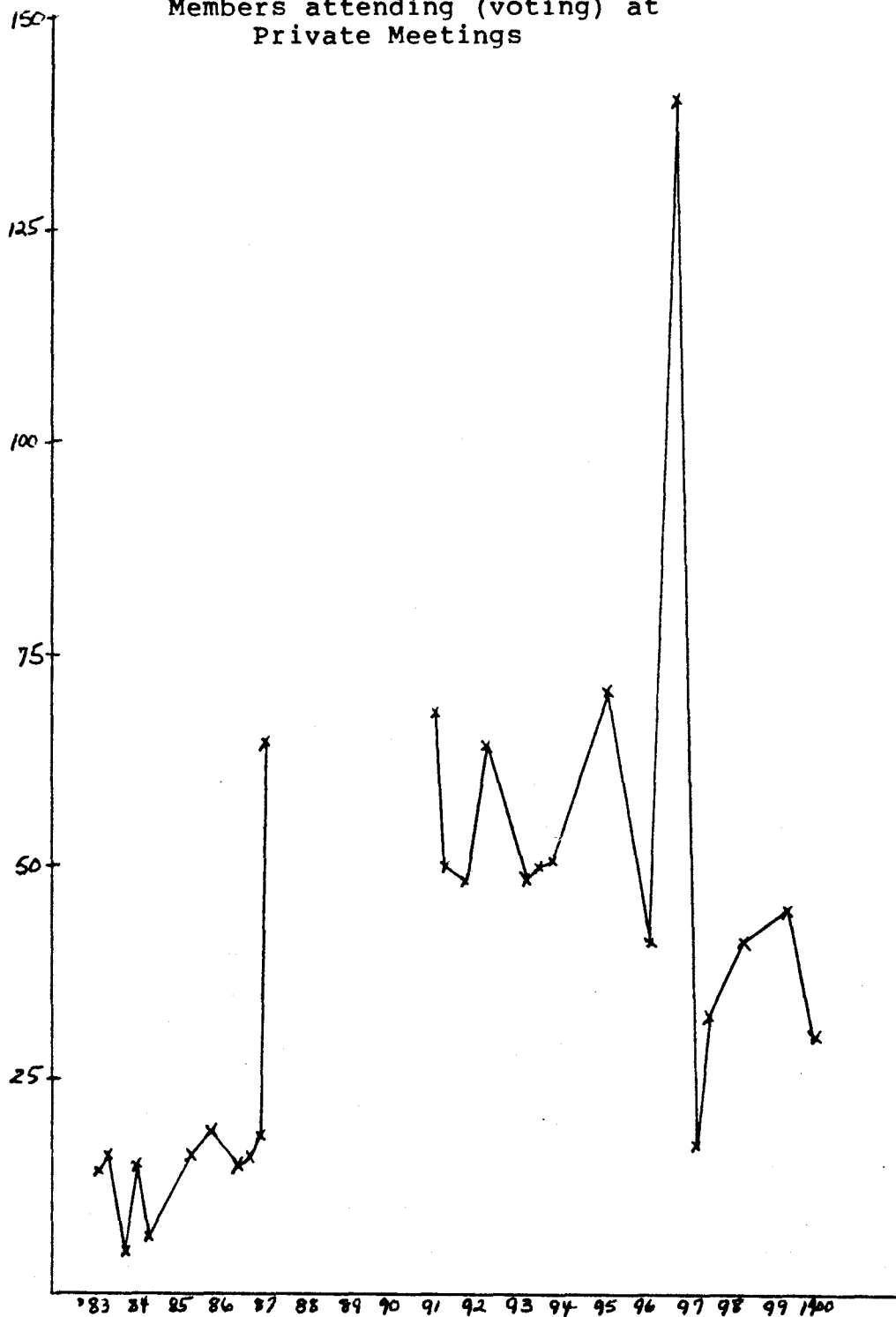


fallen. By the late 1890s, attendance had reached the lowest point tallied in the previous ten years.⁵⁹ In addition to the problems this created for the Fabian public image, a clear change in the attitude and aggressiveness of the membership emerges from this period, much to the surprise and detriment of the Fabian Executive. Especially in question was the position of Webb; and it may be argued that an increasingly vocal resistance to the traditional policy of the Executive, under the influence and direction of Webb, permanently crippled the Society while concurrently providing Webb with the incentive to seek political control and prestige outside the strict confines of the Society.

Evidence from the Fabian Minute Books indicates that by early 1897 the sparsely attended membership meetings had not only declined to new lows in numbers, but had actually begun voting against certain of Webb's resolutions--an unprecedented action in the previous ten years of recorded voting.⁶⁰ Despite subsequent loss of voting support by the Executive Committee as a whole, the Executive Committee's cohesive core continued to hold enough support to ensure its dominance into the early years of the twentieth century. Support waned, however, and dissent and splits deepened within the ranks of the membership with the pressing issue of imperialism which

FIGURE II

Members attending (voting) at
Private Meetings



the Society had hitherto been successful in avoiding; for the Fabian leadership regarded imperialism, and foreign affairs in general, as unimportant to both the citizenry and future of British Society. It was the Imperialism Issue which eventually led to irreconcilable divisions of opinion, and, finally, to the passing of the Old Gang some years later from dominance in London socialist circles.

Although various Fabians claimed to have strongly influenced socialists and social policies outside of England, no one in the Society had been permitted, from the inception of the Society, to make pronouncements relating to questions of foreign policy. As far back as 1886 the Fabians had gained a certain notoriety for being, among all English socialist groups (together with the Christian Socialists), the only ones to denounce and refuse to support agitation in Ireland.⁶¹ Their constitutional, insular, and pro-Liberal character had been evident in the monthly periodical The Practical Socialist, which was under Fabian control throughout its life:

The cry of "Coersion" [sic] as synonymous with tyranny, has been raised against the Liberals, but what is the coersion referred to? It is the adoption of such measures as are necessary for the bringing to justice the actors in a conspiracy of cattle-maiming, outrage, and murder, also the protection of peaceful

law-abiding citizens. It is difficult to understand how Englishmen of any party, even if they sympathize with the political aims in furtherance of which these outrages are supposed to be committed, can desire to give the protection of impunity to the perpetrators, or wish to dispense with the safeguards which have enabled the police to bring some of them to justice.⁶²

In spite of random pronouncements on the benefits of "good" or "sane," versus "jingoistic," imperialism in the later 1890s, the Executive managed to sidestep the full impact of the imperialism controversy until well into 1899, at which time pressures from the membership led the Executive to take a step in the direction of addressing matters of foreign policy "on account of their effect on home questions."⁶³

The Society's views on imperialism, in fact, were only expressed in 1897 through the words of W.P. Reeves, Agent General of New Zealand, who spoke at the Fabians' Seddon Luncheon that summer.

The Empire has not been built on by raiders and filibusters and company promoters--(hear, hear)--but by peaceful and industrious English men and women, who did not want to rule as great pro-consuls over the vast tracts of territories, and millions of the coloured races but sought for lands where they would live by peaceful industry, and to carry out some of those ideals of freedom and democracy which the old world seemed to be too prejudiced to give them. He [Seddon] was an imperialist because he believed that the coming in of the colonies would be a mighty reinforcement of progress throughout the Empire. (Cheers.)⁶⁴

Pease's wry observations on the Society's past work with

the imperialism question later that year served only to stimulate intra-membership communication and interest; for it was not until October, 1899 that the usually prolific Fabian Society had at least admitted the existence of a substantial gap in their commitment to basic education and the collection and dissemination of information on topics of interest to English society at large.⁶⁵ This vacuum was filled in part by W.A.S. Hewins' lecture some two months later, explaining that there were two types of imperialism: retrogressive, characterized by national jealousies and jingoism; and imperialism of a "good sense," stemming from the invaluable duty of advanced nations to colonies and dependencies to foster "efficiency in all classes."⁶⁶

The Executive's reaction to the fermenting imperial situation was the predictable proposition that a Tract be immediately prepared and issued on that subject, a contingency which on at least two previous occasions had successfully served to put the voices of dissonance to rest. A motion to consider a resolution on the question of the Transvaal, however, was voted down 26-19.⁶⁷ Olivier, an Executive member who had on past occasions opposed the traditional policy of the Executive, brought the matter before a wider spectrum of the Fabian membership by officially proposing that his

views on the Transvaal be printed (at his own expense) and circulated to the entire membership of the Society. Olivier complained in his open letter to the Executive that

I do not think that we (the Fabian Executive) can leave the matter of the Transvaal War question to lie where it was left last night. So far as I understand there was no clear agreement that the subject should be raised again either by Whelen's lecture or on any other occasion. At the Executive meeting, indeed, so far as anything was said in my hearing, it was that Whelen's lecture should not be made a peg for a war discussion.

It petrified me to hear Whelen address the Society, but . . . I was relieved that we were at least spared the argument, by the spokesman of the Executive Committee, that the question [of the war] was out of the order of concerns of the Society.

You yourself [Pease], however, suggested that manner of view at the Executive; and possibly it is seriously held by some other members of the Committee and the Society. You and others who, in fact, signed your names to the Memorial against the war may consider that the Society can and ought to abstain from making up its corporate mind on this question. I disagree. It is obviously impossible for me [being] a public official in the British Foreign Service [to] take a public lead in bringing the question before the Society but I think that if the Executive don't do so it will prove a very far reaching decision in regard to the future of the Fabians. It will remain that the Society must once more confine itself to be merely the organ of what I may call "Hutchinson Trust" work. . . .⁶⁸

Olivier's motion at the following Executive meeting "that a draft leaflet on the bearing of the Transvaal War on Socialism be submitted to the Society at an early date," was defeated--this time by a margin of one vote (7 to 6).⁶⁹

The "Anti-Imperialism" alliance continued to grow

and within a month, S.G. Hobson, who would be elected to the Executive six months later, circulated a resolution condemning the war and committing the Society to a "revival of a sane democratic temper as the necessity of all Socialist progress."⁷⁰ Shaw, representing the Old Gang, issued a counter-proposal expressing the inevitability of imperial expansion and the benefits to both the conqueror and the conquered, provided, of course, that certain "imperial precautions" were adhered to.⁷¹ Unexpectedly, Hobson's resolution was supported by a vote of 59 to 50; Shaw's defeated by a vote of 27 to 58. Lacking a three-fourths majority vote for either resolution, however, neither proposal could be adopted. Subsequently, about fifteen to twenty members resigned in disgust, including Walter Crane, the artist, Pete Curran, Mrs. Pankhurst, and Mr. and Mrs. J.R. MacDonald.⁷²

The "Imperialists" were predictably furious, and prophecies of doom continued to issue forth, for the most part from conservative members of the Executive. Pease, as coordinator, leveled charges of "Wrecking" against the "rebels" and campaigned extensively for member support. An aura of doom penetrated the spirits of many of the older members which Bland and Shaw typified:

All these documents about the Transvaal are rather alarming. Don't let us, after all these years, split

the society by declaring ourselves on a non-socialist point of policy. To wreck ourselves on the Transvaal after weathering Home Rule would be too silly. Our sole business is to work out a practical scheme for securing the mines when we "resume" the Transvaal.⁷³

The heat of this controversy had not subsided by the time new Executive elections were held in April of 1900. At that time, contrary to previous condemnations, solicitations for votes were intense in both the Imperialist and Anti-Imperialist camps. In far away as Manchester it was reported that "the election of the new Executive practically resulted in a drawn battle between the two sections."⁷⁴ For the first time, the general membership was exposed to openly warring factions with both issues and allies clearly drawn. Dodd, an Executive candidate campaigning on behalf of the Anti-Imperialists, circulated the following communiqué to potentially sympathetic members:

I venture to enclose a list of some of the candidates for the Fabian Executive ["some of" appears inserted] and would ask you to vote for them and urge your friends to vote for them on two grounds:--

(1) There is a strong feeling among many of us who are watching events, that the time has come to strengthen the more advanced section of the Fabian Executive so as to bring the Society into closer touch with the General Socialist Movement.

(2) Because although it is not desired to reopen the late controversy as to the proposed announcement on Imperialism, it is at the present moment very important that an majority of the Fabian Executive should be pledged opponents of a national aggressive policy.⁷⁵

Webb, not to be outdone, broke his customary habit of never becoming openly involved in Fabian confrontations and circulated an open solicitation which unequivocally presented the Old Gang's position:

As I do not think you have yet voted in the election of the Fabian Executive now pending, I venture to ask you to fill up and return your Ballot Paper at once.

On this occasion a vigorous attempt is being made by certain new candidates to get themselves and their friends elected; and the usual step in some instances [has] been taken by asking members to vote only for these eight candidates. This may also have the unfortunate result of excluding from the Executive two or three very useful workers, whose silent service to the Society is less well known to the members. On this account, in particular, I venture on this occasion, to importune you to record your vote--whomever you prefer to vote for.

If you wish a continuance of the Society on the same general lines as heretofore, I advise you to vote for the eleven candidates named below. . . .
Bland, Bell, Macrosty, Oakeshott, Miss O'Brien,
Pease, Shaw, Mrs. Shaw, Standring, Webb, Whelen.⁷⁶

In the resulting election, the Old Gang maintained a majority position on the Executive, winning ten of fifteen Executive seats.

Thereafter, the Society was never the same. Never before had the membership been exposed to such division; and never again would the traditionalists reign unopposed in Executive conclaves. In the years which followed, several assaults against the remnants of the Old Gang were made, resulting in numerous resignations by both the thwarted and the disenchanted. By the outbreak of World War I, the power of the Old Gang had been

completely broken, and the Society--turning more and more to matters of pure research and education--became eclipsed first by the Labour Representation Committee, and then by the Labour Party. In the interim Pease and Webb especially maintained substantial control over Fabian policies and publications through both the manipulation of procedures and committees, and by processing as much of the Society's business as possible through unofficial channels.⁷⁷

The desire of the younger members to push ahead with new, relevant Fabian activities continually surfaced and was supported by many of those desirous of belonging to a unified, powerful, mass party;⁷⁸ their efforts, however, met with continual opposition by the long-standing and determined group of Old Gangsters who had weathered similar such attacks over the years. The "young-men-in-a-hurry," as one member labeled them, moved on into the vital surroundings of the pre-war Labour Party or other radical groups. Most who fought and failed in attempting to reform the Fabian Society were of a mind with H.G. Wells, who, resigning his Fabian membership in 1908, expressed disagreement both with the Basis of the Fabian Society and with the Society's activities in general. Wells' point of contention over the Basis lay in the fact that, in his opinion, it could

not be modified. This problem, according to Wells and his sympathizers, was compounded by a perceived resistance to change under the Society's existing leadership. A change which sought to pervade the structure and policies of the group itself. Wells' efforts to campaign for a revised Basis and a revised propaganda were resisted by "forces" which Wells felt could not be influenced. The resulting opposition and irritation demoralized him to the point where he felt that membership in an unreformed Fabian Society was flatly a waste of his time.

If one attempts to reduce Wells' objections to an identifiable concern, it must be his fear that the Fabian Society was pursuing a futile course. This was to be seen especially in his criticisms of the educational programs of the Society; programs which had held primacy in the Group's organizational and intellectual development from at least the 1890s. Instead of development and dissemination of their ideas in an effort to set the stage for the practical achievement of Socialism, Wells felt that the Fabians were dissipating their energies "in all sorts of immediate political and personal complications."

Let me add [continues Wells] that I think that the period of opportunity came and found us divided in

theory and undecided in action. The petty growth that is going on is a mockery of the things we might have done. It is however no good lamenting our might-have-beens and it is to other media and elaboration of those collectivist ideas which all of us have at heart.⁷⁹

Such was the view of the progressive elements of the Fabian Society following the Imperialism Question and the subsequent birth of the Labour Party.

While Fabian scholars such as Cole feel that the imperial incident as it related to the Fabians and the resulting Fabian elections was merely "an attempt . . . by Hobson and one or two of his friends to run an 'anti-imperialist ticket'," ⁸⁰ many non-Fabian scholars view this incident and period as a force destructive of Fabian unity. Elie Halevy, a friend of Wallas', described the Webbs in the early 1900s as "convinced imperialists . . . looking to a national and militarist state to realize their programs . . . [feeling] contempt for every formula of Liberalism and free trade."⁸¹ Pelling, in a similar tone, claimed the Fabians as a group lost respect among the trade unionists they had courted so long for their willingness to compromise with jingoism.⁸² Even Shaw, keen to avoid confrontation on "a non-Socialist point of policy," ⁸³ gained the support of Bland in attempting to steer the Society from the Imperialism Question, reasoning that "if we throw ourselves dead athwart the Imperialist, or any other, strong stream or tendency" the

work of the Society would be crippled.⁸⁴ The Star and the Sun likewise detected the magnitude of the split within the Fabian Society, noting in 1900 that "the Imperialists had carried," and that "the majority of the Fabian Society have thrown themselves in favor of 'an aggressive national policy'."⁸⁵

The result of the imperialism issue reflects a breakdown of the Society's, and more particularly the Executive's, ability to satisfactorily identify diverse issues and elements and resolve them effectively within the context of the spirit of the times. Never before had the Executive so successfully won a battle but lost a war. Perhaps it was due to their inexperience in dealing with the issues of foreign policy or their failure to recognize a sizable anti-imperialist sentiment both outside the Executive and outside the Society. Instead, they had attempted to resolve this conflict in manners similar to those used to solve previous conflicts of opinion which did not take into account the political climate outside the Society's immediate confines.

FOOTNOTES

¹Cole, intro., History. Adds Cole, "he [Pease] was quite right to stress the absence of any orthodoxy

and the fact that no individual, however influential, had the conscience of the Society in his keeping" (Ibid.). Pease made this statement in History, p. 11, as well.

²Pease, History, p. 52.

³Members' Meeting, Executive Minute Books, December 4, 1885. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Herein is reported the resignation of Keddell, one of the original members of both the Society and the Executive. Keddell had resigned because of Bland's motion "on behalf of the Executive Committee that this Society record its opinion that the conduct of the Social Democratic Federation in accepting money from the Tory party in payment of the election expenses of Socialist candidates is calculated to disgrace the Socialist movement in England." The motion was carried 15 to 4.

⁴Fabian News, March, 1892. Of the thirteen Executive members voting on this issue, only Dell, Lowerison, and Olivier voted against it. Dell and Lowerison also were not returned to the Executive in the following month's elections.

⁵Fabian News, July, 1897.

⁶Letter from J.R. MacDonald to an unidentified party, cited in Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, ed. Margaret Cole and Barbara Drake (London: n.p., 1948), p. 132. The Hutchinson Trust was established upon the death of a wealthy Fabian (Henry Hutchinson) for the purpose of promoting socialism. All of the members of the Trust's Board were Fabians, including Sidney Webb and Pease.

⁷Executive Minute Books, May 6, 1887. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁸Executive Minutes, September 25, 1896.

⁹Letter to Webb from Bland, May 7, 1890. Wallas Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London. Howsbawm subscribes to this assertion, commenting that "Fabianism" could be defined as holding the views of Webb, Wallas, Shaw, and Olivier ("Fabianism," p. iii). He goes on to say that left wing opposition within the Fabian Society was "consistent and strong" in the Report of the Fabian Conference and in correspondence between Shaw and Webb (Ibid., pp. 76ff).

¹⁰Executive Minutes, May 5, 1891. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹¹E.R. Pease, in Cole, ed., Webbs and Work, pp. 18-19. Hobsbawm notes ("Fabianism," pp. 87-90) that Bland represented the permanent opposition within the Fabian Executive and that he only cooperated with Webb against "younger rebels" when the Old Gang was assaulted. The allusion to Bland's collaboration with the Executive leadership probably stems from a letter written with the Executive's knowledge to Olivier from S.G. Hobson (October 24, 1899. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford) alleging that Bland was ". . . prevented from spiting Webb only when his urgent toryism draws him together with the remainder of the old gang against younger rebels."

¹²See Fabian News, August, 1894 as well where the Executive had explained officially that he had "only attended four of twelve meetings since election."

¹³Letter from Stewart Headlam to Edward R. Pease, March 5, 1894, Draft. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹⁴Letter from MacDonald to Pease, April 3, 1896. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹⁵Executive Minutes, July 24, 1896. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹⁶Daily Chronicle, October 19, 1896. The author of this insert, probably Pease, failed to note that MacDonald was a member of the Executive at the time of the conflict.

¹⁷Letter from Annie Besant to Pease, March 17, 1890. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹⁸For example Henry Harben, in an undated letter to Pease (Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford) decrying internal conflicts of the Executive, "and especially committees."

¹⁹Letter from J.R. MacDonald to E.R. Pease, May 1896, "Friday 1 a.m." Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²⁰Executive Minutes, December 15, 1893. Fabian

Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²¹Letter from Emma Brooke to E.R. Pease, March 9, 1894. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²²Executive Minute Books, March 9, 1894. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²³Fabian News, May, 1894.

²⁴Fabian News, June, 1894. The motion proposed by Brooke in her letter read: "That in order to meet in some degree the growing spirit of narrow domination in the Fabian Executive, the committees for special purposes be thrown open to any member willing to serve on them, rather than be appointed by the Executive: in the event of no one coming forward, the committees to be nominated by the assembled Executive committee, and never by a single member of the Executive."

²⁵Letter from MacDonald to Pease, March 6, 1896. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²⁶Letter from MacDonald to Pease, July 1, 1896. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Norma and Jeanne MacKenzie, The First Fabians (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), p. 157. The incident, occupying less than a dozen lines in MacKenzie, is rendered from Sidney Webb's point of view alone.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Written communication to the Fabian Society from J.F. Runciman, cited without date of composition in Executive Minute Books, November 10, 1891 (Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford). Runciman was Secretary of the Fabian Society's Southern Group for several years until his resignation from the Society over policy matters. He was noted for his aggressiveness and educational programs as well as for his uncompromising stance on socialist issues.

³¹Letter from J.F. Runciman to the Fabian Society, November, 1891. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. This letter is probably the one cited

in the Executive Minutes of November 10, 1891.

³²Letter from J.F. Runciman to the Fabian Society, November, 1891. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

³³Executive Minute Books, November 24, 1891. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Mention was also made of the Southern Group (of which the Blochs were members) having issued a "circular libeling Webb [~~"us"~~ crossed out and "Webb" inserted in Pease's hand] about same. Write referring them to Rules."

³⁴Executive Minute Books, December 1, 1891. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

³⁵As noted above, the Executive previously, as in Bolas' case, had dismissed cases of "libel" and generally tended to ignore all but the most threatening attacks on their aims, methods, or personalities.

³⁶Reported in Executive Minute Books, January 5, 1892. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

³⁷Executive Minute Books, December 8, 1891, printed insert. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. The Southern Group was comprised of London Fabians resident south of the Thames. It was one of the most active Groups, but fell into ruin soon after the Runciman affair.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Members Meeting, Executive Minute Book, December 19, 1891. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴²"Southern Group and the Executive," printed circular, n.d. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Fabian News, January, 1892. This is the version usually incorporated into secondary accounts of

the Runciman incident.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Letter to E.R. Pease from J.F. Runciman, May 11, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴⁷Executive Minute Books, May 12, 1893; May 19, 1893; March 12, 1897. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴⁸Letter from Hubert Bland to Sidney Webb, May 7, 1890. Wallas Papers, The British Library of Political and Economic Science, London.

⁴⁹Executive Minute Books, September 1, 1893; September 22, 1893; Fabian News, November, 1893.

⁵⁰Sun, November 24, 1893.

⁵¹Fabian News, May, 1894 and June, 1894.

⁵²Fabian News, July, 1897.

⁵³Letter from H.D. Harben to E.R. Pease, June 12, 1912. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁵⁴Executive Minute Books, May 1, 1896. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁵⁵For additional examples see Executive Minute Books, January 28, 1892; March 9, 1894; April 27, 1894. Fabian News, February, 1892 and September, 1896.

⁵⁶Pease, History, pp. 130-32.

⁵⁷The Fabian News and Minute Books are filled with references to members' apathy. By the late 1890s almost all correspondence programs, group meetings, and reading circles had been canceled because of lack of interest among the membership. Fabian News notes in disgust (May, 1899) that of 861 members, only 2 signed up for the proposed Fabian Book Club, and only one member had paid the fee.

⁵⁸See Figure I, page 93.

⁵⁹See Figure II, page, 95.

⁶⁰There are no recorded instances of Webb losing a vote affecting policy change in the Society between 1887 and 1897. After that time, Webb and the Executive lost several (Executive Minute Books, February 26, 1897; Fabian News, June, 1897 and July, 1897). Webb gleaned much needed support, however, by reviewing his own book, Industrial Democracy, in the May, 1898 issue of the News. Commented Beatrice Webb, "Our book has been extraordinarily well received. . . . We can now feel assured that with the Fabian Society as a propagandistic organization . . . no young man or woman who is anxious to study or to work in public affairs can fail to come under our influence" (Diary, March, 1898).

⁶¹See Pall Mall Gazette, February, 1886. The Belfast Star, under the editorship of Bruce Wallas, a Christian Socialist and Fabian throughout most of the 1890s, did favor Home Rule, abolition or reform of Catholic schools, etc. It folded after a short time for lack of support.

⁶²"London Socialists--The Dangerous Element: Its Character and Strength" appeared in the Daily Telegraph of February 15, 1886; The Practical Socialist reference was cited therein. The latter paper appeared only during 1886-1887. As late as the Executive meeting of February 19, 1897 troubles in the Greek states were passed over, "Greece and Crete [being] not our affair." When an informative discussion on imperialism was proposed later that summer, it was decided on a vote of 6-2 that Charles Dilke should be invited to speak as an expert on that topic.

⁶³Executive Minute Books, March 19, 1899. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Amplification of this general point of view is to be found in Fabian News, December, 1898 and August, 1899, and the Daily Chronicle for July, 1897. The Clarion, founded and edited by Blatchford, also came out for the defense of the Empire, but against Imperialism.

⁶⁴Daily Chronicle, July 9, 1897.

⁶⁵See Executive Minutes for October 13, 1899. Here Pease reports "Tracts, Manifestos, discussions, resolutions or other matters recorded in the minutes of the Society since its foundation dealing with national, imperial, or foreign affairs (other than those directly connected with labor) as follows:

| | <u>Tracts, &c.</u> | <u>Discussions</u> | <u>Resolutions"</u> |
|-------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Total | 0 | 0 | 0 |

⁶⁶Reported in Fabian News, December, 1898. Hewins was Sidney Webb's choice as head of the London School of Economics and became, on Webb's recommendation and insistence, its first director. His lecture was entitled "Imperial Policy in Relation to the Social Question."

⁶⁷Fabian News, November, 1899. Also noted in the report of the October 13th members' meeting was the comment that "a new chapter in the political development of Ireland had begun." The Society did in fact set up a series of lectures in Ireland; but the low level of interest there in such offerings did not provide justification for extensive follow-up. The program was dropped within the year. The Society's general posture on "Imperial Problems" was that "on the whole, the mass of difficult questions settled without war in the partition of Africa was a credit to the human race and the British navy." The Report of the Publishing Committee on the proposed Tract, "Imperialism, True and False," also appears with the October 13, 1899 minutes and recommends that the Tract address only the question of expansion and militarism.

⁶⁸Letter to E.R. Pease from Sydney Olivier, October 16, 1899. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Few specifics are known about Whelen's lecture, other than it was part of the Fabians' fall lecture series, and, as such, represented content in line with then existing Executive policy. It was also one of the first occasions on which the delicate issue of the Transvaal question was raised.

⁶⁹Executive Minute Books, October 20, 1899. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁷⁰"Transvaal War Meeting. Resolution to be moved by S.G. Hobson," typescript, in Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. In a characteristic letter to a Mr. Hughes (June 17, 1940), Pease in his usual vindictive fashion says "I think that the less said about Sam Hobson the better. Newer members know little of him. Other members will not care to be reminded of him. . . . It is to his credit that he never tried to borrow from me, but in this respect I think I was singular. He used to get me to cash small checks on the plea that it was not banking hours: they were all paid ultimately after one

or more R.D. returns. . . . His autobiography contains one story, not offensive, about me which puzzles me completely. I cannot recollect anything about it, and it concerns depredation on the Fabian furniture account which I am convinced never existed at all."

71 "Amendment of G. Shaw," typescript, Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. The text, which was cited in the Daily Chronicle of December 9, 1899, is to be found in many typed and printed versions, all substantially similar. It was also the topic of several other newspaper articles illustrative of the Fabians' views on the Imperial Question.

72 The Fabian Annual Report for the year ending March 31, 1900 reverses the voting tallies reported in the Minute Book. Margaret Cole also reports that the Imperialism issue actually lost the Society about 50 members (Cole, "Story of Fabian Socialism," in Fabian Journal, April, 1954).

73 Letter from G.B. Shaw to E.R. Pease, October 30, 1899. Written by Shaw aboard the S.S. 'Lusitania'. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Similar correspondence exists in the Shaw Collection (manuscript) in the British Library.

74 Manchester Guardian, undated clipping, Fabian clipping box. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

75 Letter from L. Lawson Dodd to Mr. Bicker-Caarten, March 26, 1900. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

76 Unaddressed letter from Sidney Webb, April 13, 1900. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

77 The correspondence collections at both Nuffield College and the British Library contain numerous notes and private communications between Webb and Pease which would substantiate a charge of conspiratorial collaboration, e.g.: organization and action of attack plan for Factory legislation (April 20, 1900); private tea for select members of the Executive (1902); coaching for press interviews (1904); Hutchinson Trust threatening to cut off funds to the Fabian Society if monies were offered to Parliamentary candidates (September 22, 1900); filling in of blank voting slips by the Executive and friends (April 1, 1900); tactics to gain approval of a

manifesto without membership consultation ("Dispensing with sending members proofs"--September 11, 1900); methods of gaining "intellectual influence and thus power" (November 12, 1901). The latter point especially was pivotal in the endless discussions between the Webbs and MacDonald concerning the use of Hutchinson Trust monies. MacDonald and those close to him insisted that the Webbs were hoarding Hutchinson Trust monies largely for their own benefit and fame.

⁷⁸G. Rose Armstrong to Edward R. Pease, December 11, 1906. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁷⁹H.G. Wells to E.R. Pease, September 16, 1908. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁸⁰Cole, Story, p. 101, f.n.1.

⁸¹Elie Halevy, Imperialism and the Rise of Labor, p. 365.

⁸²Pelling, Origins, p. 226.

⁸³Letter from G.B. Shaw to E.R. Pease, October 30, 1899. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁸⁴Letter from Hubert Bland to E.R. Pease, October 17, 1899. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁸⁵"Fabian Executive Election," Sun; and "Fabian War Tactics," Star, April 21, 1900.

CHAPTER V

THE EVOLUTION OF FABIAN FINANCES

Despite their unmasked dislike of Marxism, the Fabians--unlike the more "anti-scientific" socialists of the day--were concerned with the movement of the economy and its effect on the nature and direction of men's lives. While their political message dwelt upon the benefits of the redistribution of unearned income, however, their day to day concerns were more akin to those they faced as journalists, professional people, or civil servants in their private lives. It is not surprising that the Fabians', indeed the socialist revival in general's, concern for an economic reorganization or reordering should have come at a time of world economic crisis, national self-doubt, and a rapid increase of what the Fabian and economist J.A. Hobson termed "felt poverty."

Most historians of late Victorian Britain term the period from about 1873 to 1896 as that of the Great

Depression, typified by overproduction, declining prices for finished goods, a slackening of capital formation, anxiety over labor unrest, and a mushrooming fear of foreign competition and eventual dominance, especially of world markets.¹ This situation was complicated, moreover, by the constant expectation that prosperity was just around the corner. Such interludes of inflated hopes went far, for example, in Ausubel's eyes, towards generating the despair of the '80s when "English cultural chauvinism grew markedly as English economic leadership declined."² As if the staying power of the economic crisis were not enough to stifle the spirits of the hardiest optimists, the enfranchisement of most male workers in 1867 and 1884 and the prospects implicit in Gladstonian reform, generated renewed concern in middle and upper class circles about the situation of the lower classes as well as the question of freedom versus authority.³

Amid these currents and interests stood the Fabians, middle class reformers only too well aware of "a vast mass . . . living on the verge of starvation and in hideous squalor,"⁴ and of the efforts of the Trade Councils and new unionists poised to sample the gamut of alternatives from general strikes to collectivist politics to better their individual and corporate

situations. The Fabians, in an effort to influence any audible opinion, applied their talents almost from the beginning to the area of propaganda, and, as time progressed, more specifically to educational pursuits. Central to their activities, however, was the matter of funding, without which even letters to the editors of London's meanest tabloids would not find their way. While the Fabians' entanglement with finances filled much of their available time, and, to a great extent, shaped their thinking on political and social questions, the most obvious manifestation of their concern with liquidity in recessionary if not depression-ridden times was in the relationship between finances and the group's membership (composition) and direction.

While the specifics of Fabian membership are covered in a subsequent chapter, it is noteworthy that from the early 1890s the general membership of the Fabian Society was regarded largely as a source of common funds almost beyond any other consideration. According to Joseph Schumpeter, one of the characteristics of the Fabians was that they were economically independent.⁵ It was this economic independence, in fact, that for Schumpeter explains the availability of bourgeois leadership for socialism in the late nineteenth century.⁶ While there is a certain amount of validity in such a

view, it tends to obscure the fact that money was the chief concern of the Fabian leadership whereas principles were more often than not the motivating concern of the rank and file. This is not to say that matters of financial resources held no place in Fabianism until the socialist revival and labor agitation of the late 1880s and early 1890s; for as early as 1883, in discussing the blueprint for the Fellowship of the New Life, it was agreed that members of the fledgling organization would contribute funds voluntarily as needed.⁷ An analysis of the Fabian financial statements which have survived strongly indicates that liquidity and cash flow were ever preponderant in the minds of the leadership from the 1890s onward. It was not until 1889, in fact, that this matter of voluntary contributions came under the scrutiny of the Fabian leadership. At that time, in opening the first meeting of the Society's new fiscal year, the leadership "called attention to the average amount of subscriptions made by members to the Society's funds."⁸ By the following year, the Fabians' publishing expenses had mushroomed to such an extent that for the first time the Society's minutes recorded that only 20 per cent of the entire membership had contributed anything to the group's operating funds. Even Olivier personally urged those present "to be more prompt, if not more liberal in

paying subscriptions."⁹ In a Fabian News article which appeared some time thereafter, additional pressure was put on the membership for contributions, the Executive reporting that "each member costs the Society £5 per year in tracts, postage, Fabian News, etc."¹⁰ It was during this period as well that fixed subscriptions for membership were proposed, The Weekly Times and Echo noting in their October 30, 1892 issue that the standard Fabian subscription was £1 per annum, or 5s. per quarter.¹¹ The official Fabian proposal for such subscriptions took the form of a circular issued to London members in late 1892 asking a promise of an annual subscription payable on a fixed date.¹² Concerns raised in the Executive meeting of December 16, 1892, were also circulated to the membership, the Fabian News reporting that still only 28 per cent of the membership had subscribed to the Society's funds during 1892. The following year Webb, Pease, and the Executive attempted to rectify this problem by insisting that a fee be paid by each candidate for election (such sum to be refunded in the event of black-balls).¹³ Similar efforts were made, especially by Pease and Sidney Webb, to assure that Provincial members, once solicited without regard to their financial resources,¹⁴ were now selected with an eye toward their ability to aid the London Society to the

best of their financial ability on at least some occasions.¹⁵

While measures such as these no doubt contributed to the increase in funds from subscriptions over the next three years, the "purges" which appear so regularly from 1894 onward were probably the most effective means developed by the Fabian leadership to both reduce those expenses associated with membership and forcefully demonstrate that a non-contributing member was generally an unwanted member.¹⁶ Almost all election notices posted in the Executive Minute Books from 1894 specified that candidates elected who were not paid up in their subscriptions were not to be officially carried on the Fabian membership roster. In at least two cases, membership instatement was held over until explanations could be given by certain members as to why their contributions were so "unduly small."¹⁷ In Webb's mind especially there existed a very logical progression which made some marginal amount of wealth an important qualification for Fabian membership. Essentially it involved the nature of individual interest and the necessary (and to Shaw as well, inevitable) form of future society.

For the Fabian leadership the essential element of progressive reform was an assemblage of experts who

could competently and efficiently expunge contemporary society of the one-sided and haphazard inequities which unbalanced the natural order of things. At least to Sidney Webb, Beatrice Webb, and Shaw, the Fabians were to be in the vanguard of those who would set things straight and establish the new order. Beatrice Webb, in fact, appeared to have Fabian membership qualifications in mind when she confided to her diary:

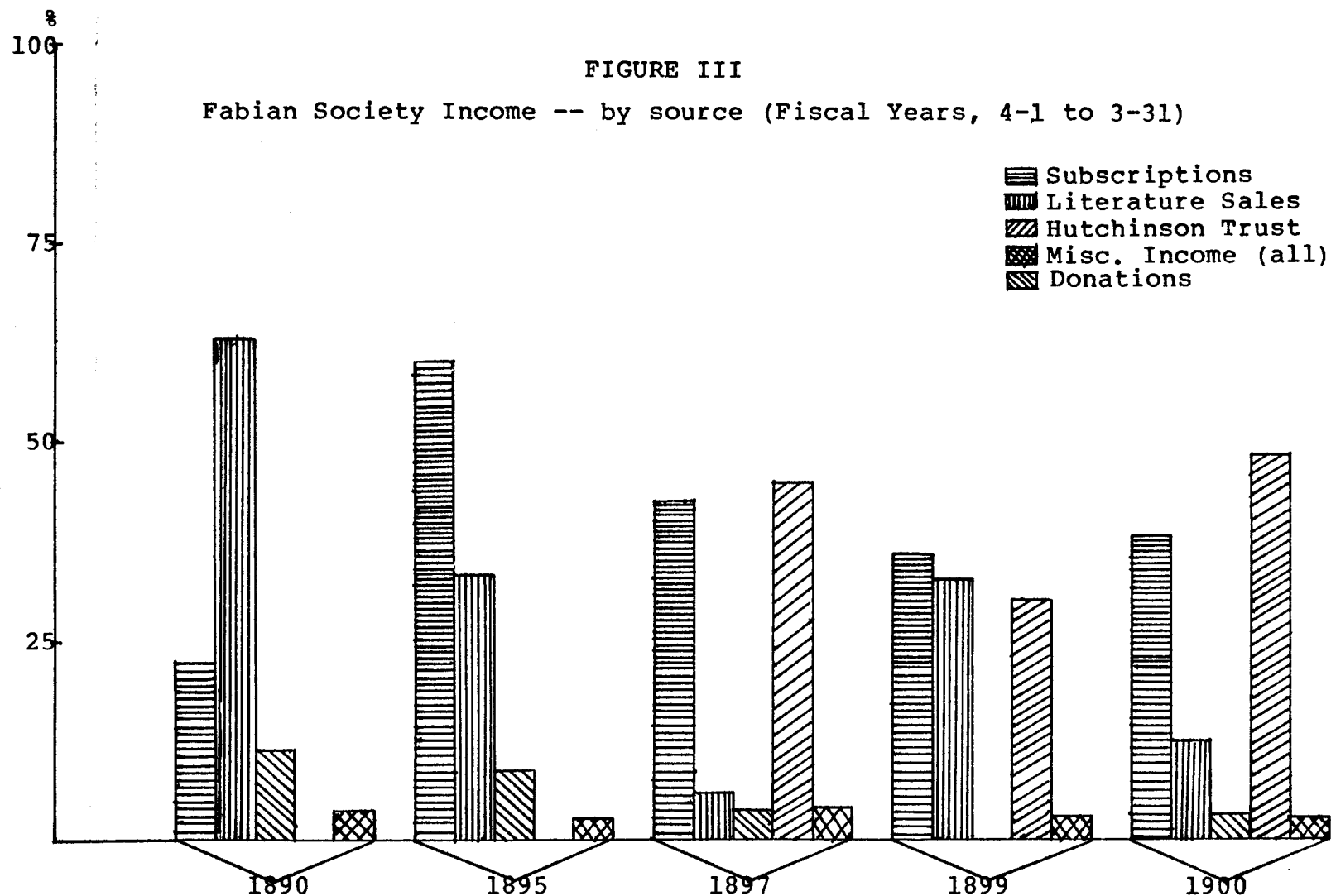
It looks as though the bulk of the working-men will be collectivist by the end of the century. But reform will not be brought about by shouting. What is needed is hard thinking. And the same objection applies to sending nondescript Socialists into Parliament. . . . Last evening we sat by the fire and jotted down a list of subjects which wanted clearing up: issues of fact which needed elucidating. Above all, we wanted the ordinary citizen to feel that reforming society is not a light matter, and must be taken by experts specially trained for the purpose.¹⁸

Of course the mere project of keeping extant experts alive, let alone training new ones, required a substantial and regular source of income. This income, ranging from less than £100 per year in the '80s to over £1000 per year in the mid and late 1890s, was raised by the Fabian Society from four primary sources: subscriptions, donations, the sale of goods and services (including rents!), and an institution known as the Hutchinson Trust.

Subscriptions, which fell 60 per cent from the

boom years of the 1890s by the end of the century, came exclusively from members of the Fabian Society.

Representing less than 30 per cent of member involvement, these subscriptions ranged from under 5/- to more than £5, those over several pounds usually being classified in Fabian accounts as "Special subscriptions". The range of subscriptions as a percentage of total Fabian income, as well as other sources, is presented on the following page as Graph III.¹⁹ Happily, many of the wealthier Fabians favored the Society with above average subscriptions which served, as the case may be, to stem the rising tide of window-breaking socialists or to serve the masses.²⁰ Especially notable among this group was D'Arcy Reeve, a wealthy member of the National Liberal Club sponsored to Fabian membership by Pease and Sidney Webb. He contributed special subscriptions and donations of over £1500 from 1891 to 1898. If Reeve had been heavily solicited, it was always possible to write to other wealthy Fabians, such as Henry Hutchinson, "for some more cash,"²¹ or, perhaps, approach a member such as Annie Horniman, the young patroness of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, who "secretary reported had come in for £50,000."²² Sometimes, of course, reciprocity was expected as well, Oakeshott having to read Hutchinson's book with a view towards publication,²³ or the Executive



Committee having to print a vanity tract for Sir H.

Bacon,²⁴ or start a review for Reeve.²⁵

By the late 1890s, however, subscriptions began to fall off both in magnitude and as a percentage of total income. A comparison of yearly subscription rates for 1897 and 1900, the only one appearing in the Fabian Minute Books or elsewhere in the Archives, outlines the essence of the subscription problems at a glance:²⁶

| | 1900 | | 1897 | |
|--------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | number | amount | number | amount |
| under 5/- | 30 | 3.10.0 | 42 | 4.19.0 |
| 5/- to 9/6 | 60 | 17.14.0 | 65 | 17.9.11 |
| 10/- to 19/6 | 41 | 21.1.8 | 43 | 23.5.6 |
| 20/- to 21/- | 32 | 32.12.0 | 33 | 33.16.0 |
| over 21/- | 7 | 21.14.0 | 18 | 40.17.6 |
| "Special" | 0 | --- | 1 | 50.0.0 |

142
£71

141
£74

The trend toward fewer and lower subscriptions was echoed by Webb, who wrote to Pease:

I have for some time wanted a special appeal to members to increase their subscriptions--we want some standard. I suggest that we should urge people to pay at a minimum, 10/- per £100 of income or earnings.²⁷

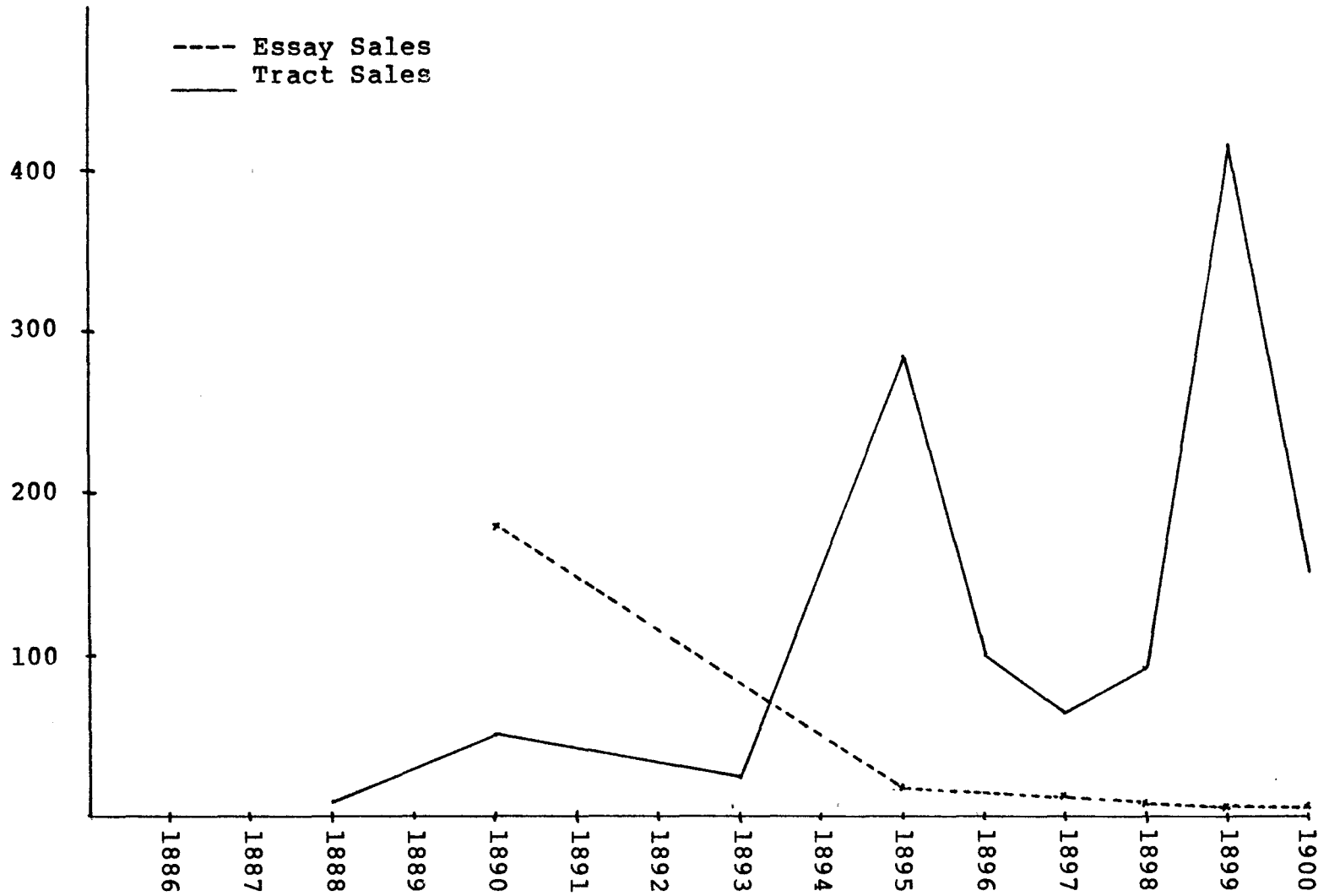
Webb's concern was reflected in the Executive pleading of December, 1900 which stressed the copious amount of work being done by the Executive and Publishing Committees,

urging those addressed to increase their contributions by at least 25 per cent to a minimum level of 5s. per £100 of income or greater if possible.²⁸ Such pleas, as was usually the case, went largely ignored, the only boons of the 1890s being the Hutchinson Trust and one unexpectedly large sale of Tracts.²⁹

If generous subscribers were rare gems, donors of any sort were so much the rarer. Periodically, however, donations from Reeve, Hutchinson (especially for county lectures, specifically), and others were obtained. At one point, during the yearly June financial crisis of 1893, the Executive noted "Finances: Draft letter to Millionaire Fabians by Shaw was read and approved, and list of millionaires adopted."³⁰ Although income continued to fall until well into 1896, efforts continued with "Socialism for Millionaires" the following year as well as an expanded budget for office furniture and upkeep. Executive intelligence continued to scout special subscriptions and donations as well, the overall climate being transparently confided to Pease by Sidney Webb noting one prospect as follows:

Here is an adherent R.A. Bray of some little importance. He is quite the best of the last crop of L.C.C.'s and has proven a vigorous fighter for progress in Education, etc. Apart from either political party or religion. . . . If he has not sent you a subscription he would, of course, be taken to subscribing. He is not rich now, but will be some

FIGURE IV
Fabian Literature Sales (£)

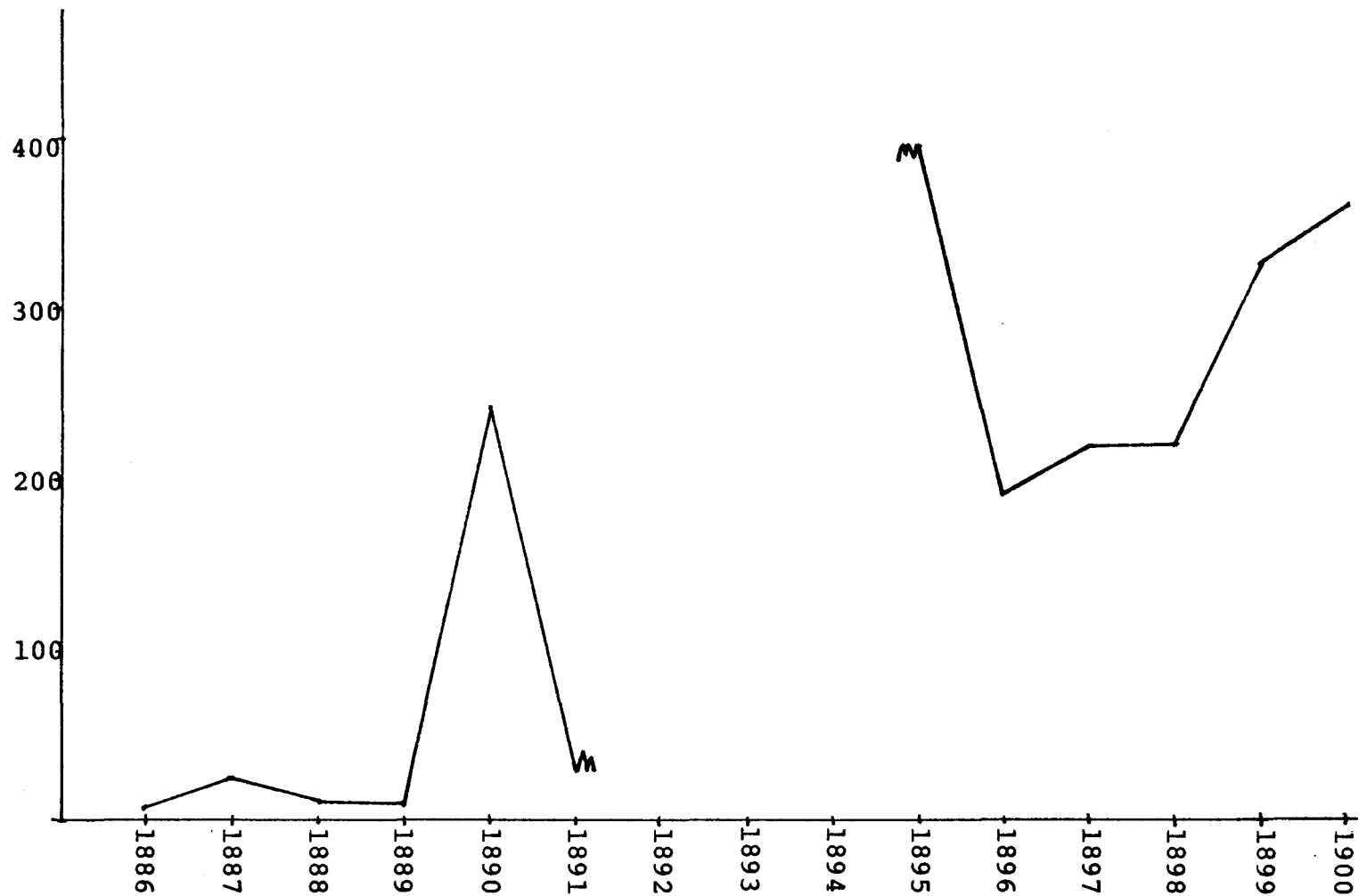


day.³¹

Donations, nevertheless, fell as well, declining steadily from 1890 through 1900, with the exception of 1897 and 1900 when they rose from 0 to 3 per cent of the Society's total income. This excludes, of course, the Hutchinson Trust which is briefly outlined below.

Income from sources other than these was restricted to the sale of the Society's literature.³² This income producing literature was restricted largely to Essays and Tracts, pamphlets usually being given away free of charge. The Fabian News, operating at an estimated production expense to income ratio of 25:1, was never a profitable line of business for the Fabian Society.³³ Some additional income was realized from such sources as paid advertisements (especially in Tracts), the prepayment of literature by non-members, and such cost cutting measures as the reduction of the Fabian News to four pages per issue, the reduction of county lecture expenses from 1893 to 1895, and a general tightening of the Fabian budget as it related to services and published communications to the membership.³⁴ With the charter of the Publishing Committee being interpreted at this time as the "securing of a paying publishing business,"³⁵ publishing expenses rapidly expanded to match if not exceed income.³⁶ With priorities and programs such as

FIGURE V
Fabian Printing Expenses (£)



these, it was the leadership's hope that the income picture would improve; but while literature sales did increase in absolute terms, they fell continuously as a percentage of total income for the entire decade of the 1890s.³⁷ With the tailing off of both literature and subscription income it is reasonable to suppose that without the windfall generated by the Hutchinson Trust, Fabian activity would have sunk below the level of public recognition before the end of the nineteenth century. This windfall, however, providing up to half the Society's total operating income from the mid-'90s until its exhaustion in 1904, permitted the group to promote its reputation before the public eye through increased activity in the areas of both propaganda and publications.

Henry Hunt Hutchinson was elected to Fabian membership in June of 1890. A well-off clerk to the Justices of Derby, Hutchinson spent some time in London, an occasional winter with his wife in California, and a good deal of time and money following the activities of the Fabians, the Land Restoration League, and the Land Nationalization Society until his death by suicide in 1894 at the age of 70. Almost from the time of his joining the Fabians Hutchinson made it known that some funds would be made available for Fabian work. While

most scholars do identify Hutchinson with money for county lectures it was Shaw, in fact, who originally proposed that the county lecture circuit be funded with Hutchinson's early contributions.³⁸ Cash continued to be forthcoming from Hutchinson, the Executive noting in 1893 that given sufficient funds, the "whole efforts" of the Fabian Society should be devoted to the question of education.

From the time of Hutchinson's death, the situation is masked through the Fabians' and especially Sidney Webb's compulsion, at the Executive level, for keeping secret the fact that Hutchinson willed to the Fabian cause some £10,000 clear, an amount equal at that time to the Society's total income for at least a decade. From the beginning, however, Webb, as First Chairman of the resultant "Hutchinson Trust", represented Society and Executive opinion as to the disposition and handling of the Trust's proceeds. Webb's correspondence to Pease throughout mid and late 1894 harped on the fact that the existence of the Trust, and later its amount and uses, must be "kept quiet," "dead secret," "hushed up," etc. lest subscriptions dry up and Fabian revenues in general fall.⁴⁰ It was Webb, in fact, who specified unilaterally at the time Hutchinson's will was probated, that the assets of the Trust would not be used to subsidize the

Fabian Society, but would be used for special projects only, for example books and for retaining "cleaver young economists" for "research" purposes.⁴¹ Within two weeks of the reading of Hutchinson's will, Webb engaged a Darby attorney to prove the will. His instructions to Pease were specific: "Tell the Executive" that Hutchinson's daughter and he Webb would be executors with five Trustees being appointed as follows: Webb (First Chairman), Pease, Miss Hutchinson, Clarke, and DeMattos (the latter two being Fabians and Executive members). It was further explained that if and when cash were released, it would not inure to the benefit of either the Fabian Society or the Executive. Webb's reasoning was that such a move would "dry up" subscriptions and cause the Society to suffer a loss of revenues. Instead, the Trust would be used for special projects, "outside the Fabian Society's usual expenditure."⁴² Webb elaborated on this latter theme some days later, explaining that while county lectures (the cause to which Hutchinson's initial contributions had been donated) were important, a grant from the Hutchinson Trust would cause "subscriptions to fall off," and, furthermore, would duplicate work which the Fabian Society per se was already doing. Therefore, in Webb's estimation, the Trust monies should go for special projects with grants, literature, and

lecturing having the highest priorities.⁴³

As will be noted from Figure III above, Hutchinson Trust monies played a considerable part in the Fabian Society's funding of lecturing and publishing activities.

Funds from the trust were also used to cover book box cost overruns,⁴⁴ special distributions of Tracts,⁴⁵ and a portion of the Fabians' overhead (e.g. office rent) which was officially allocated to Hutchinson Trust work.⁴⁶

While there were some discussions and minor disagreements on how Trust monies should be allocated among these various activities, the biggest area of Society and individual dissatisfaction (for those even aware of the Trust's existence let alone its operations) concerned the control of the Trust, especially as it related to Sidney Webb.

Webb's penchant for secrecy combined with his fanatical dedication to research and the collection of statistics has raised the question of ends and means in the minds of both contemporaries and subsequent scholars. That the foundation of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) was made possible largely through the availability of Hutchinson Trust monies is generally known; what has never been resolved, however, was Webb's role in the LSE/Hutchinson Trust drama, or the effect of this particular occurrence on the Fabian Society.

According to Graham Wallas, who claimed to have been with Bernard Shaw and the Webbs on the day following the announcement of Henry Hutchinson's will, Sidney and Beatrice Webb claimed that the proceeds of the Hutchinson Trust bequest would be best utilized for a school along the lines of the Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques in Paris.⁴⁷ Cole, corroborating this story, attributes to Beatrice Webb the corollary that the Executive and the Fabian Society would have to stay lean with no money to be spent on "political activity" per se.⁴⁸ The remaining details of the development of the London School of Economics and Political Science and the popular conception of the utilization of the Hutchinson Trust can be found in Cole.⁴⁹ Scholarly opinion in general, however, favors an undue amount of control over the Trust on the part of Sidney Webb.⁵⁰ Pease, reluctant to pass up a chance for puffery, reminisced that he (as Secretary) and Webb (as First Chairman) virtually ran the Trust for the duration of its existence.⁵¹ The issue is skirted in his History (p. 124) where he pointedly avoids any treatment of the Trust, claiming that as the Fabian Society and the LSE were never directly or organizationally related, mention of the Trust naturally falls outside his treatment of the Society. He goes on to state that he, Miss Hutchinson, Haldane, and Webb decided

amongst themselves that half the Trust would be used for the LSE and the remaining half would be used for lectures and book boxes.⁵² Freemantle as well favors domination by Webb,⁵³ as do the MacKenzies⁵⁴ and McBriar,⁵⁵ although the latter tends to favor Beatrice Webb and sometimes "Fabians" in general as motive powers in the formation of the School. Harry Snell is alone in claiming that the Hutchinson Trust was never controlled by the Fabians, the Trustees, or anyone else, taking the position that it was "totally generous."⁵⁶

Regardless of the shades of opinion on dominant figures in the Hutchinson Trust/LSE imbroglio, it is apparent from contemporary sources that Webb indeed controlled the Trust to the extent that he decided whether or not Trustees would remain on the board of the Trust or not,⁵⁷ what programs would or would not be supported with Hutchinson Trust monies,⁵⁸ and what information about the Trust, its condition, or operation would be released.⁵⁹ Upon closer investigation Webb's real motivation may have been baser than the traditionally held opinion that he and the other Fabian leaders were completely selfless. The clue in this case is a letter from Webb to Pease, explicitly divulging that his ultimate plan for the LSE was to have it taken into the University (of London) and subsequently use this position

to infiltrate and take over the economics department.⁶⁰ His dedication to this plan alienated MacDonald, Olivier, and even Shaw and Wallas, who regarded Webb's alliance with the Tories in support of subsidies for religious schools (as a rider to the Educational Reform Bill) as an outrage.⁶¹ There is further evidence to support an assertion that Webb, in the interest of meeting the School's estimated operating budget of over £2000 per year, called upon Fabians and their sympathizers alike to divert their contributions from the financially troubled Fabian Society to the LSE building and educational program funds.⁶²

In the same way that such monetary manipulations show Sidney Webb the university magnate in a different light from Sidney Webb the Fabian Socialist, so the issue and concept of money affected Fabian policy as subtly as it did membership solicitation overtly. While Fabian Socialism never espoused equality of incomes in the days of the Old Gang,⁶³ it did lambaste those groups which profited excessively from the accumulation of unearned interest and income (rents and interest specifically). The Fabians' continued and vigorous attacks on excess profits and unearned income especially in the early 1890s drew rebuttals from politicians and the press which accused the Society of any number of crimes ranging from

rabble-rousing to rampant anti-clericalism.⁶⁴ The middle class backgrounds of a large number of the Fabian leaders, as well as the Fabian rank and file, were perhaps partially responsible for the Fabians' natural position that superior skills demanded superior rewards. It may as well be related to their condemnation of "free market economists" who were "in flat defiance of Adam Smith, McCulloch, Mill and Marshall alike."⁶⁵

Webb's concern for economic principles is carried as well into the Fabian program for future social reorganization which appears to be characterized by an overwhelming bureaucracy. According to McBriar, the only control which higher authority would have over the lower ones would be financial in nature and in substance.⁶⁶ The only facet of this social and bureaucratic reorganization which seems at variance with traditional economic theory and with the Fabians' strict regard for numerical detail, is the question of financing. The answer for Webb was purely academic: "A good Radical Budget was dependent on no surplus--it made its own surplus."⁶⁷ A contemporary article in the Fabian News commenting on a Bill in Parliament noted as well that many of the pressing problems of the day could best be solved by expanding the bureaucracy and responsibilities of government. No treatment of the associated costs of

such a move, however, was ever rendered.⁶⁸ Although the Fabians and others were quizzed on their oversight in this respect, the Fabians made no substantive reply other than that the profits currently going to the providers of goods and services would be going to the government departments which would take over such existing functions. An especially penetrating critique of this position was put forth by "Nemo" in the study "Labor and Luxury" which queried as well where the funds would come from to compensate those whose property or service firms were nationalized or municipalized.⁶⁹ The reply to this critique, endorsed by the Fabian Executive and published in the Fabian News, was simple and penetrating as well: "A person so singularly stupid should not be allowed to write books."⁷⁰ The Fabians' reaction to their critics, together with their own treatment of the group's financial affairs, imply that the question of financial resources was secondary to that of promoting educational programs of questionable practicality. Barely considered, for example, was the relationship between the shortage of funds and the curtailment of services. In the Fabians' case such problems surfaced from 1893 with the discontinuation of free literature distribution and continued through 1900 when the Fabian lecture circuit was virtually abandoned due to the Society's

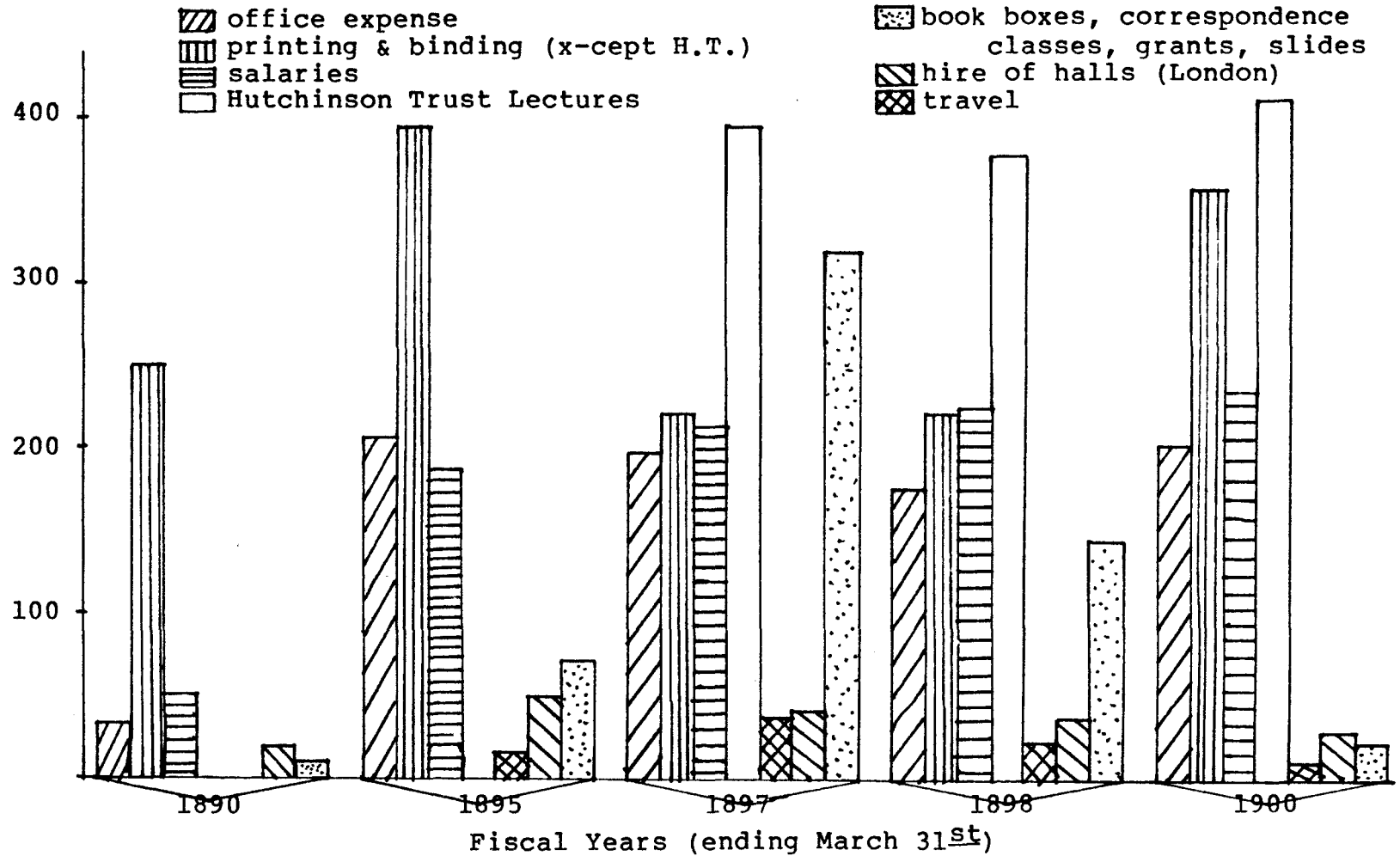
insolvency.⁷¹

The question of Fabian insolvency was begged continuously from the creation of the Hutchinson Trust. Although the Annual Report of 1897 insists that the books showed a deficit for that year for the first time ever, the Society's Minutes show multiple deficits in 1893 and as far back as 1886.⁷² In addition, the Society was constantly over budget in expenses. The Executive noted in July (1891) that the whole year's income had already been pledged or spent.⁷³ A similar situation existed almost without exception from 1889 through 1901, the stringencies becoming greater with the passage of time. To make sense of this trend, it is essential to turn once again to Sidney Webb and his allies, and the pivotal events which ushered in the twentieth century.

It would be naive to assume that Webb retained unflagging belief in the power of Fabian permeation by the year 1900. In addition, the Society had lost any hope of tapping trade union funds after the defeat of the independent labor candidates in the elections of 1895. By the end of that decade, the gains the Fabians had made outside London had also been lost due to neglect, their myopic attention paid to London politics, and the massive defection of local Fabian Societies to the S.D.F. and the I.L.P. In charting Fabian expenditures through the

1890s, it can also be concluded that even the hire of halls in London itself had been cut back drastically leaving only the abortive Irish lecture campaign of 1900 to drain the Society of its last vestige of liquidity.⁷⁴ Even expenses for travel beyond the confines of London were severely restricted. Formerly important projects such as book boxes, correspondence classes, and lantern slides were largely abandoned as well.⁷⁵ The Society's stand, or rather lack of one, on the imperialism issue, as well as the formation of the LRC, effectively terminated the usefulness and future prospects of the Society despite several ill-organized and destructive attempts on the part of younger members of the Society to divert the course of the Society from that charted by the Old Gang. The fact that expenditures for office operation, staff, and literature publication remained at reasonably constant levels through this period, however, suggests that priorities had actually shifted in the minds of the Fabian leadership. Henceforth, missionary work turned to resource utilization and the consolidation of the Society's infrastructure. These steps, in the opinion of the leadership, would defend the Society's assets against new-comers who would squander the Society's remaining funds on image campaigns, membership drives, and overt political activity.

FIGURE VI
Fabian Society Expenses (in £) by Category



The growth and organization of the LSE, citadel of Webb and his allies from which they would take the economic world by storm, was also running at an accelerated pace at this time, suggesting that while money may indeed have not been an end to Webb or others of his ilk, it was certainly an essential ingredient in the fabrication of his influence in the scholarly community and dominance in local politics. This is borne out some months later in private correspondence between Webb and Pease where the new departure is outlined in succinct and unambiguous form. In one correspondence, Webb impresses upon Pease the necessity of carefully targeting future propaganda programs to those "belonging either to the 'center' or to the non-political class."⁷⁶ The object of such a shift in strategy, which explicitly excluded the solicitation of university students of a non-political nature, was unmistakable: "What we are aiming at is intellectual influence and thus power, not money."⁷⁷ Webb's specific recommendations included the cultivation of men, not women, and the concentration of efforts in England and Wales--Scotland being too diverse to develop efficiently, "and over-sea residents being no good." London, of course, was to have top priority in the development of new and expanded targets for Fabian propaganda. "The very people I want to influence,"

continued Webb, are "the great non-political, socially influential, finally decisive folk whom we have to get at," such as ministers, lawyers, and doctors. It was this posture of exclusiveness and power-seeking that served both to cut the Fabian Society off from the nascent labor movement and to identify the vanguard of the Society with narrow academic and middle class concerns.

FOOTNOTES

¹Charles Wilson, "Economy and Society in late Victorian Britain," Economic History Review, 2nd series, 18 (1965-66), pp. 183-84, is an exception to this view. Wilson thinks rather that these symptoms were more an indication of decelerated growth rather than depression.

²Herman Ausubel, In Hard Times: Reformers Among the Late Victorians (New York: 1960), p. 33.

³Lord Zouche (Curzon) noted after the 1868 elections "The Queen signs anything Gladstone orders her to sign without even a squeek, while he is sawing off one leg of her throne after another." Letter from Lord Zouche to Walter Sneyd, March 9, 1872 (also July 24, 1871). Walter Sneyd Papers, John Rylands Library.

⁴E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1964), p. xvi.

⁵Joseph A. Schumpeter, Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy (New York: Harper & Row, n.d.), 3rd edition, p. 322.

⁶Ibid., p. 311.

⁷Executive Minute Books, November 16, 1883 and November 23, 1883. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁸Members' Meeting Minute Books, April 5, 1889. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁹Ibid., January 3, 1890.

¹⁰Fabian News, February, 1892, p. 46. Cf. as well Executive Minute Books for October 25, 1895 for a similar orchestration where "secretary brought up report observing that new members cost about 3/4d. ea., and that average working expenses can come to about 15/- per member. Also analyses of subscriptions for 1894-5-- Agreed that be put in News explaining position." (Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.)

¹¹"Fabians and Others," in The Weekly Times and Echo, October 30, 1892.

¹²Fabian News, November, 1892, p. 35.

¹³Members' Meeting, Minute Books, April, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Reported in the Fabian News, April, 1893, p. 6.

¹⁴See, for example, letter from Sidney Webb to E.R. Pease, September 18, 1892. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹⁵Letter from James Billson to E.R. Pease, January 27, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford; letter from Ramesden Balmforth to Graham Wallas, December 17, 1892. Wallas Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London.

¹⁶By order of the Executive Committee (Minutes, January 19, 1894) members delinquent since December 31, 1892 were struck from the membership roster. In several cases (e.g. January 13 and January 20, 1893; January 15, 1897) those of kind heart or energetic spirit were exempted from payment of subscriptions if hardship were the case.

¹⁷Executive Minute Books, November 17, 1899 and December 7, 1900. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹⁸Cole, Story, p. 70. The original source is Beatrice Webb's Diary which was also cited by Cole.

¹⁹Information summarized in the accompanying

graph represents only those years for which complete and detailed accounts exist. Extant supplemental information from the Fabian records is also mentioned below where it might affect trends in the yearly summaries.

²⁰The reformist spirit is noted by Hobsbawm who stressed that "for Toynbee, as for Olivier or Beatrice Webb, the spiritual aspect of socialism was the important one; but the moral regeneration of the middle-class person could be achieved only through active service to the poor; they had no need for intellectual gymnastics for their own sakes." Hobsbawm, "Fabianism and the Fabians," p. 32.

²¹Executive Minute Books, March 9, 1894. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²²Ibid., March 30, 1894.

²³Ibid., April 25, 1892.

²⁴Ibid., November 17, 1891.

²⁵Ibid., March 27, 1891 and April 14, 1891.

²⁶Members' Meeting Books, "Report on Subscriptions," October 11, 1900. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²⁷Letter from Sidney Webb to E.R. Pease, September 11, 1900. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. J.R. MacDonald noted a similar trend in his correspondence to Pease from 1897 onward.

²⁸Open letter to the Fabian membership, printed, December, 1900, 3 pages.

²⁹In the year 1899; see Graphs IV and V. Tract sales in 1894-95 were boosted abnormally by the success of Tract 53, explaining the new Parish Councils Act. Pease notes that this was the first time that an analysis of a new Act of Parliament had been published as a penny Tract, thus increasing overall demand (History, p. 122). The Tract boom of 1898-99 was due to a similar situation, this being the issuance of Tract 82, another penny Tract, describing the rights of workmen under the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1897. McBriar observes that this practical guide to "basic economic issues" received additional support especially from the Trade Unions and

the I.L.P. (Fabian Socialism, p. 173).

³⁰Executive Minute Books, June 30, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

³¹Letter from Sidney Webb to E.R. Pease, November 16, 1905. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

³²The exception to this was miscellaneous sales, services, and income which never exceeded 2 to 3 percent of the Society's income. Examples include receipts from equipment and office rental, correspondence classes, book boxes, royalties, etc.

³³Average expenses were approximately £50 per year versus income of about £2 per year in paid subscriptions. For an indication of the progress of Tract and Essay sales, see Figure IV.

³⁴Cf. Executive Meeting Minute Books, January 20, 1893 for details. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶See Figure V. The expense spike of 1890 is due to the publication of the Essays.

³⁷See Figure III for particulars.

³⁸Executive Committee Minutes, Minute Books, July 29, 1890 and August 15, 1890. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. See also Special Executive Meeting Minutes of August 11, 1891 as well as Executive Minutes of October 17 and November 24, 1891.

³⁹Executive Minutes, November 3, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴⁰Letters from Sidney Webb to E.R. Pease, August 25, September 11, September 14, and September 27, 1894. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. In fairness to Webb, an analysis of the Fabian Society's income accounts appears to bear out Webb's fears in this respect (cf. Figure III).

⁴¹Ibid., August 25, 1894.

⁴²Letter from Sidney Webb to E.R. Pease,

September 11, 1894. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴³Ibid., September 14, 1894.

⁴⁴Ibid., September 10, 1896.

⁴⁵Memo from Sidney Webb to E.R. Pease, June 17, 1904. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴⁶Executive Committee Minute Books, October 13, 1891. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. See also the Fabian Society "Annual Report" for 1895.

⁴⁷London School of Economics and Political Science, Student's Handbook, 1925.

⁴⁸Cole, Story, pp. 68-69.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 67-77.

⁵⁰Hobsbawm, "Fabianism and the Fabians," p. 221.

⁵¹Pease, in Cole, ed., Webbs and Work, p. 20.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 20-21 and "Fabian Journal," 4, 1954.

⁵³Annie Jackson Freemantle, This Little Band of Prophets: The Story of the Gentle Fabians (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960), p. 121.

⁵⁴Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, The First Fabians (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), pp. 224, 226ff.

⁵⁵McBriar, Fabian Socialism, pp. 219, 292.

⁵⁶Lord Snell, Men, Movements and Myself (London: 1936), pp. 120-21.

⁵⁷Letter from Sidney Webb to E.R. Pease, October 16, 1898. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁵⁸Letter from J.R. MacDonald to E.R. Pease, March 6, 1895, as well as April 3 and 11, 1896. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁵⁹Fabian News, December, 1897.

⁶⁰Letter from Sidney Webb to E.R. Pease, July 15,

1897. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁶¹MacKenzie, First Fabians, p. 228. Beatrice Webb's subsequent migration towards a position of arrogant intellectual supremacy, combined with Sidney Webb's desire to make contemporary educational programs as elaborate and "high class" as possible (letter from Sidney Webb to E.R. Pease, January, 1900. Nuffield), further alienated many of the rank and file of the Society swept up in the mass anti-war furor of the I.L.P. and the growing nationalistic sentiments of the trade unionists.

⁶²For instance in the cases of Bacon (£200), Lyall (L10), Mrs. Phillimore (£50), and Mrs. Shaw (£200); see also Sidney Webb's letters to Pease of February, 1899 and August, 1900 (Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford). The first (that of February 5th) earmarks a £5 enclosure to the Fabian Society as the Webbs' joint contribution/combined subscription to the Society. Pease elsewhere noted that the Webb's customary annual individual contributions alone averaged in excess of £7 per annum.

⁶³See Tract 70 and McBriar, Fabian Socialism, pp. 57-58. Shaw, who authored Tract 70, appears to have reversed his position on this issue around 1910.

⁶⁴The Fabian theorists held no official position on the matter of religion. The Society did, however, have many clerical members and worked closely with church, temperance, and Labour Church groups in furthering the condition especially of education throughout populated areas of England. There was never any sympathy extended to the concept of publically supported religion, hence the anger of Shaw and Wallas at Webb's compromise over aid to religious schools. Compare this with Webb's statement some years earlier that "From the Indian medicine man and the sun-priests of Peru down to the Collector of Peter's Pence and the Treasurer of the Salvation Army, theological influences have ever been used to divert a portion of this rent to spiritual uses, nourishing (like the meats offered to idols), whole classes of non-producers." (Sidney Webb, "The Progress of Socialism," 18 pp. printed [1890], p. 5.)

⁶⁵Sidney Webb, "The Economic Heresies of the London County Council," 19 pp. pamphlet, 1894.

⁶⁶McBriar, Fabian Socialism, pp. 109-110.

⁶⁷Sidney Webb, "The Labour Program," in the Daily Chronicle, November 1, 1892.

⁶⁸Fabian News, November, 1892.

⁶⁹Nemo's work can be found in the 1896 edition of The Labour Annual. Here it is promoted as a reply to "Merrie England" (p. 28). It is also reviewed by J.R. Ludlow in the October, 1896 issue of Economic Review. The review appearing in The Labour Annual (p. 178) condemns the author (Nemo) for attacking labor-saving devices and free trade as greater evils than landlordism and monopoly.

⁷⁰Fabian News, May, 1895.

⁷¹An amusing solution to the Society's lecture costs proposed during the Executive Meeting of April 9th, 1897 was to increase the number of lectures given, and thus reduce the average cost per lecture.

⁷²E.g. Executive Minute Books, February 19, 1886 and February 10, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Fabian News, July, 1893 records a deficit as well.

⁷³Executive Minute Books, July 7, 1891. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁷⁴See Figure VI, page 141 above.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Letter from Sidney Webb to E.R. Pease, November 12, 1901. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁷⁷Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

THE FABIAN MEMBERSHIP

According to Cole, "the Fabian Society by 1894 . . . was made up of two main elements: the leadership, which was the Executive Committee, and the hand-picked national membership."¹ While the constitution of the Executive makes its identification and general constitution comparatively simple, a full analysis of the Fabian membership can be incomplete at best.

As noted by Cole in the citation above, the Fabian Society's membership was national in nature. It should be made clear, however, that there were two distinct classifications of members: Provincial members and London members. Provincials (or Local members as they were sometimes called) were resident outside of London. They had little or no voice in the parent organization and were seldom consulted on even the most routine matters. Members in the London Society, on the other hand, were mostly resident in London or its

environs, although some prominent or especially useful Provincial members were inducted into full membership in the London Society. An important exception was the situation of University Societies which although classified as Provincial or Local Societies, were admitted routinely to membership in the London Society. Official reports of the Fabian Society's size or activities were specifically structured with the London membership only in mind. This attitude went far no doubt in identifying the Fabian Society primarily with London interests. It is the London membership with which the current chapter is concerned, Provincial membership being relegated to the following chapter.

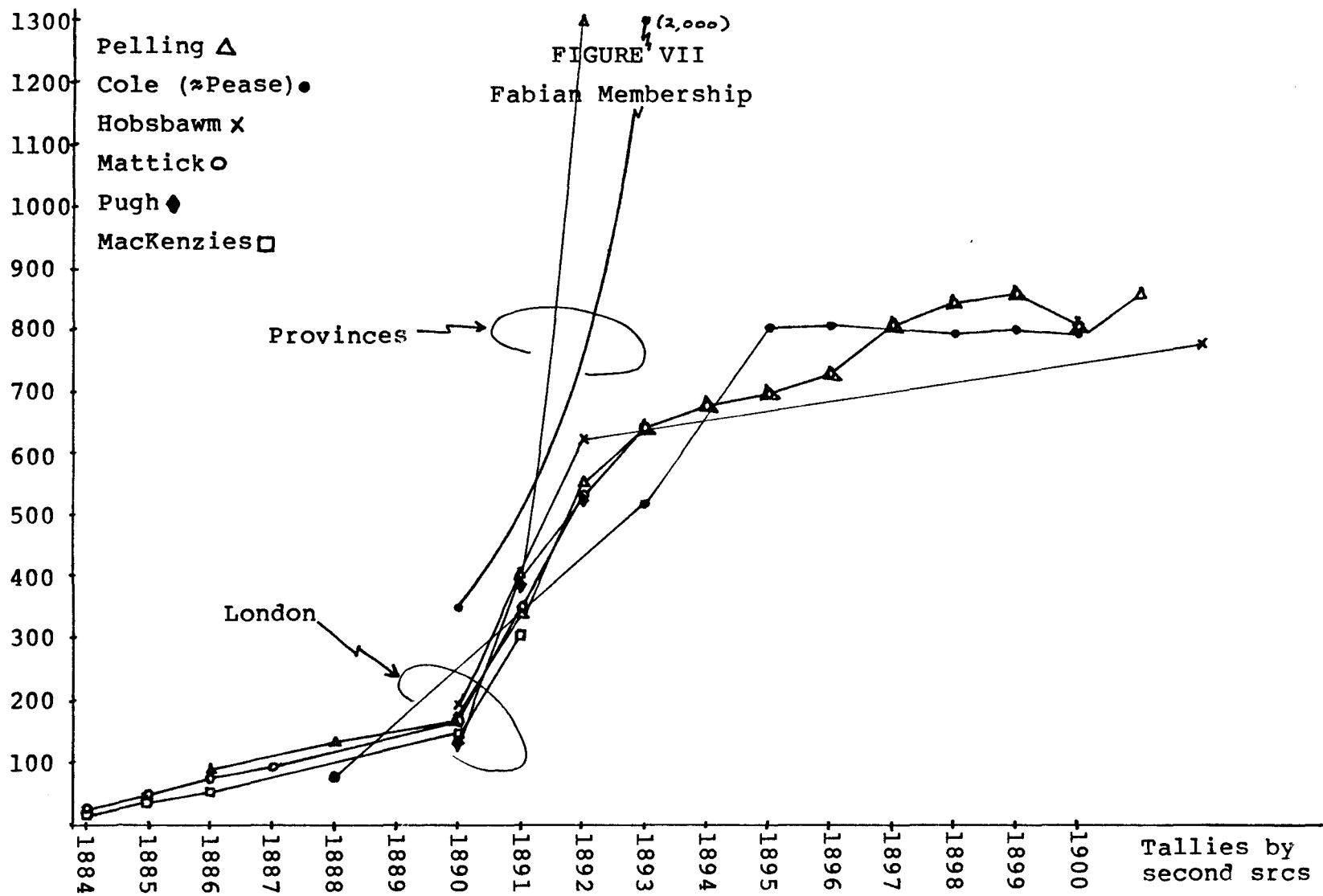
That the Fabian Society started in 1884 with very few members is a matter of both scholarly and popular record. Both Cole and McBriar amplify Pease's account of the early days of the Society which concentrated heavily on the circumstances which led a minority of the Fellowship of the New Life to found the Fabian Society. The growth pattern of the Society from this period up to the early 1890s, when a tally of members was officially undertaken, is vague and ambiguous. As the following summary shows, reports of membership in the London Society vary from nine to forty in 1884 and from less than 100 to 130 in 1889, the last year before official

figures are available.

| <u>Source</u> | <u>Reported Membership</u> | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | <u>1884</u> | <u>1885</u> | <u>1886</u> | <u>1887</u> | <u>1888</u> | <u>1889</u> |
| Cole | 9 | | 40 | | | 100 |
| Mattick (H.G. Wells) | 20 | 40 | 85 | 90 | | |
| MacKenzie | 20 | 40 | 67 | | | |
| Pelling (using Pease) | | | 90 | | | 130 |
| M.E. Murphy ("Fabian") | 40 | | | | | |
| Moore (E. Nesbit) | ----- | 30 | ----- | | | |
| <u>Daily Telegraph</u> (1886) | | | 20-200 | | | |
| <u>Aberdeen Journal</u> (1886) | | | 25 | | | |
| London clip (1884) | 12 | | | | | |

Overall trends for the period from 1884-1900 appear in Figure VII following. All sources consulted, including official Fabian tallies, acknowledge a drop-off in membership or slowing of growth as 1900 approached.²

While the Society's Annual Report for the year 1898 notes that "the increase of the Society had been at a slower rate than in previous years,"³ no reason is given or explanation offered to account for the decline in the Society's rate of growth. The Report of 1900, however, notes that "for the first time in our history, our membership shows a reduction on the year."⁴ The official account acknowledged that some resignations resulted from friction over the Society's handling of the Boer War and Imperialism Question, but attributes the measurable decline in membership to individuals "struck off as defaulters."⁵ Only in the correspondence of J.R. MacDonald is there the continual and assertive opinion





that from 1896 the membership and growth rate of the Society were becoming endangered by excessive Executive Committee domination, an unhealthy concern for money, and general disregard for the membership at large. For MacDonald, these underlying defects in the leadership were compounded an excessive on London politics, the squandering of time and money on the London School of Economics, and a feeling that continuity was more important to the Fabian leadership than progress.

Although most major sources agree with the membership figures of the Society in magnitude if not in numerical detail, the question of members' personal and professional profiles has been largely avoided. Contemporary classifications, other than those of the Fabian leadership, are to be found mostly in press clippings, biographical notations, and reports of the Society's activities. In such reports the early Fabians were always identified in much the same manner: young and middle class.⁶ Such comments are borne out by the leadership of the Society, notably Pease and Shaw. In both his press interviews and in his History Pease stresses that a majority of the membership was young, professionally employed, and well educated.⁷ These generalized classifications are upheld as well by scholars writing secondary works on the Society, most

classifying them as "bourgeois intellectuals," "middle class," and the like.⁸ In comparing this view with the Fabians' contemporary leadership, one finds Shaw, speaking as an expert on the composition of the Society, declaring that the Fabians were unique in their homogeneity of class and age: "no born rich men . . . no born poor men . . . not five years' difference between the oldest and the youngest," and, most of all, containing "no illiterate working men."⁹ The only scholar to attack the nagging problem of specifics in the Society's composition, however, is E.J. Hobsbawm, first in his Cambridge University dissertation, and later, in more refined form, as a chapter in his study Labouring Men.

For the period under investigation, Hobsbawm chose 1890 and 1892, and, utilizing membership lists, biographies, and "sources too numerous to mention," attempted to discover the occupations of a portion of the membership for those years. His 1890 sample consisted of 67 individuals of a total reported membership of 188, or, about 36%. His 1892 sample was 197 of 626 London members, or, about 31%. The results, while not purporting to be representative, are at least interesting. 1904 and 1906 figures are included as well for the sake of interest and comparison.¹⁰

SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF THE FABIAN SOCIETY, 1890-1906

| | 1890 | 1892 | 1904 | 1906 |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|-------|
| Total London Membership | 188 | 626 | 767 | 1,060 |
| Size of Sample | 67 | 197 | 194 | 244 |
| Workers: | 9 | 54 | 34 | 34 |
| Middle class jobs: | | | | |
| (1) Journalists, writers | 12 | 32 | 19 | 31 |
| (2) Universities | 4 | 10 | 33 | 44 |
| (3) Teachers | 5 | 17 | 13 | 14 |
| (4) Social & Political | 4 | 6 | 9 | 13 |
| (5) Public Officials | 6 | 8 | 13 | 13 |
| (6) Law | 1 | 2 | 3 | 7 |
| (7) Business, Commerce | 3 | 5 | 8 | 8 |
| (8) Arts | 3 | 5 | 6 | 9 |
| (9) "Lower Middle Class" | 0 | 14 | 8 | 9 |
| (10) "Professionals" | 5 | 8 | 4 | 6 |
| (11) Doctors | 4 | 8 | 13 | 17 |
| (12) Clergy | 11 | 28 | 31 | 39 |

The baseline for the current investigation was a compilation of 1392 names which were extracted from Fabian membership lists, the Fabian News, and the correspondence and notes of the Fabian Society and its members. This number of 1392 represents the entire membership roster of the London Society for the period 1884-1900 which can be verified as having been nominated for membership and subsequently elected. The entire period between 1884 and 1900 was treated as a single unit in order to identify the properties of the group as a whole for that period. The sample for which reasonably complete data existed (466) represents about 33% of the entire membership.

In reviewing Hobsbawm's categories, several problems became apparent in terms of both data isolation and overlap; consequently the current study uses slightly different categories. Utilizing the contemporary press, annuals, archival sources, correspondence, and secondary works, the following results were obtained:

SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF THE FABIAN SOCIETY, 1884-1900

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------|----------------------|------|
| Total Membership . . . | .1392 | Size of Sample . . . | .466 |
| (1) Craftsmen | .21 | | |
| (2) Manual labor. | .11 | | |
| (3) Writers, press. | .91 | | |
| (4) Universities. | .120 | | |
| (5) Teachers. | .37 | | |
| (6) Social & Political. | .19 | | |
| (7) Public Office | .30 | | |
| (8) Law | .9 | | |
| (9) Business. | .13 | | |
| (10) Arts, Theater | .6 | | |
| (11) Trades. | .9 | | |
| (12) Professional. | .11 | | |
| (13) Medical | .27 | | |
| (14) Clergy. | .52 | | |
| (15) Engineers | .10 | | |

To be expected might be the high number of journalists and writers which reflected the Fabians' interest in making the best use possible of the press and other written media. Surprising, however, was the high number of university students--no doubt a result of the intense campaigns of the 1890s to recruit the university students who would be England's future leaders, and, hopefully, in Webb's mind, willing recipients of the Fabian word.

If an attempt is made to consolidate the current

study with that of Hobsbawm, many parallels can be observed without undue strain. Although the current study also does not purport to be representative of the entire composition of the Fabian Society, it would be reasonable to infer that quantitative evidence supports the generalizations that the Fabian membership was substantially middle class, educated, and professional.

Another feature for which the Society was known was its high percentage of women members. Luckily, many references to the sex of members can be found in the Fabian records, enabling the researcher to confirm all but 21 (1.5%) of the members' sex. This resulted in the determination that 21.4%, or 293, of the Society's membership of 1371 remaining individuals were female (78.6% being male). While this does not approach Hobsbawm's magic "third" it does indicate that a substantial number of women were, in fact, members.

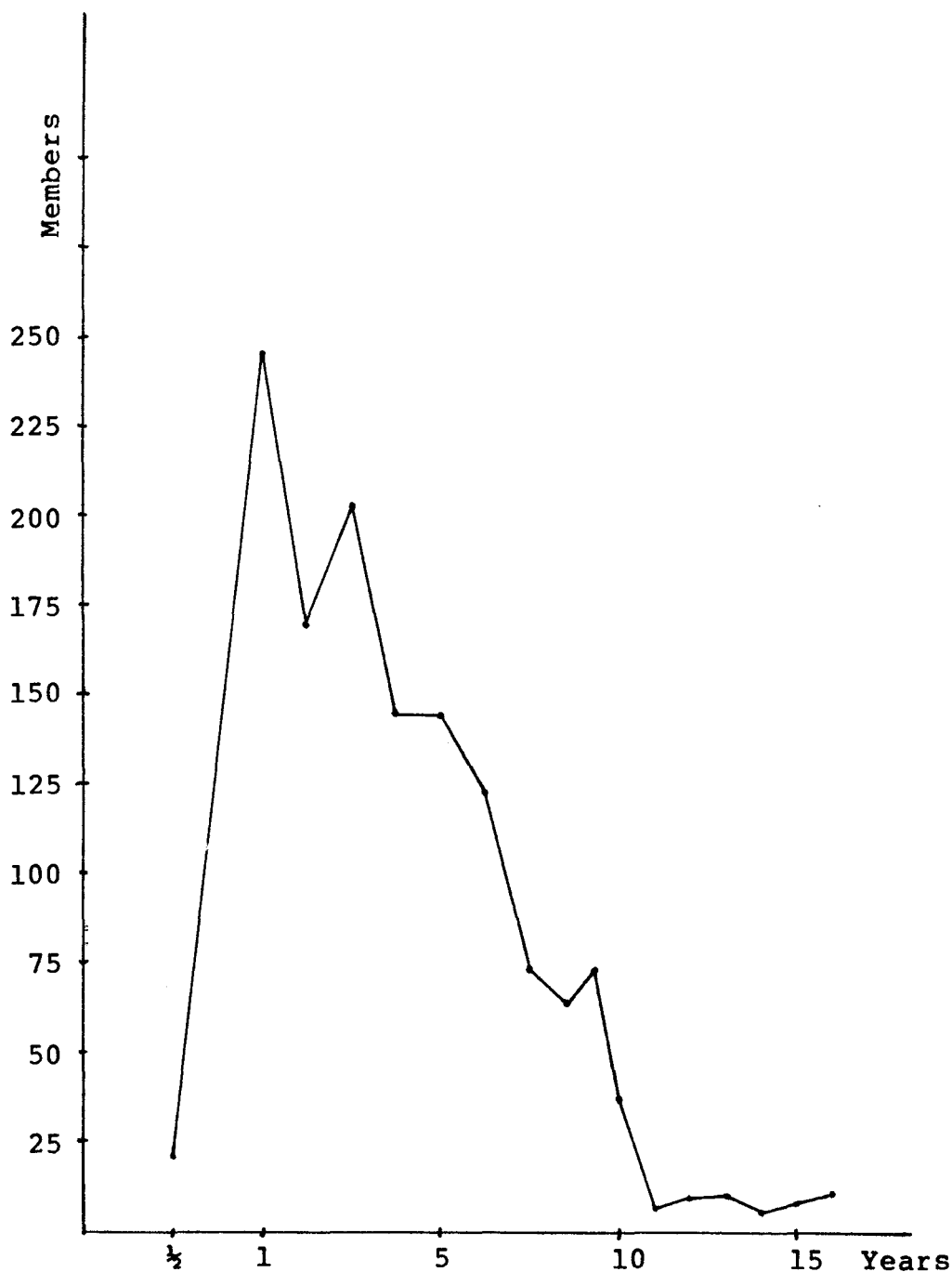
In analyzing the membership it would be most appropriate to look also at membership turnover as well as occupations. This in analyzing data on the 1392 persons who were members during the period from 1884 to 1900 it becomes apparent that the Society was much more unstable from the perspective of membership continuity than one might expect from looking at the secondary literature on the Fabians.¹¹ Following are the

distributions calculated from examinations of the membership records from 1884 to 1900, excluding the 24 persons (1.7%) for which no induction and/or termination dates could be found.

| <u>Duration of membership</u> | <u>Number/category</u> | <u>% of total</u> |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| less than 6 months | 37 | 2.7 |
| 6 mo. to 2 years | 243 | 17.5 |
| 2 years < 3 years | 172 | 12.4 |
| 3 years < 4 years | 203 | 14.6 |
| 4 years < 5 years | 143 | 10.3 |
| 5 years < 6 years | 144 | 10.3 |
| 6 years < 7 years | 122 | 8.8 |
| 7 years < 8 years | 77 | 5.5 |
| 8 years < 9 years | 68 | 4.9 |
| 9 years < 10 years | 73 | 5.2 |
| 10 years < 11 years | 35 | 2.5 |
| 11 years < 12 years | 5 | 0.4 |
| 12 years < 13 years | 10 | 0.7 |
| 13 years < 14 years | 11 | 0.8 |
| 14 years < 15 years | 5 | 0.4 |
| 15 years < 16 years | 8 | 0.6 |
| 16 years+ (charter) | 12 | 0.9 |

It is striking that the average term of Fabian Society membership for individuals was only 4.45 years, and that over 47% of the membership remained on the rolls for only three years. A graph of the table above appears as Figure IX. As might be expected, the continuity seen among members with more than ten years' seniority is partially expressed in terms of the Old Gang, all of whom had joined the Society before 1890. A parallel investigation of the Executive membership for comparisons over a similar period of time yields parallel and confirming results; that is, of the fifty possible open

FIGURE IX
Duration of Memberships in the
Fabian Society



seats on the Executive from 1884 through 1900, 34, or 68%, went to persons who held them for three years or less. Those holding them for eight years or longer were, in all cases, "Old Gangers". This lack of continuity in the broad base of the general membership and the Executive was no doubt a contributing factor in the domination of the Old Gang.

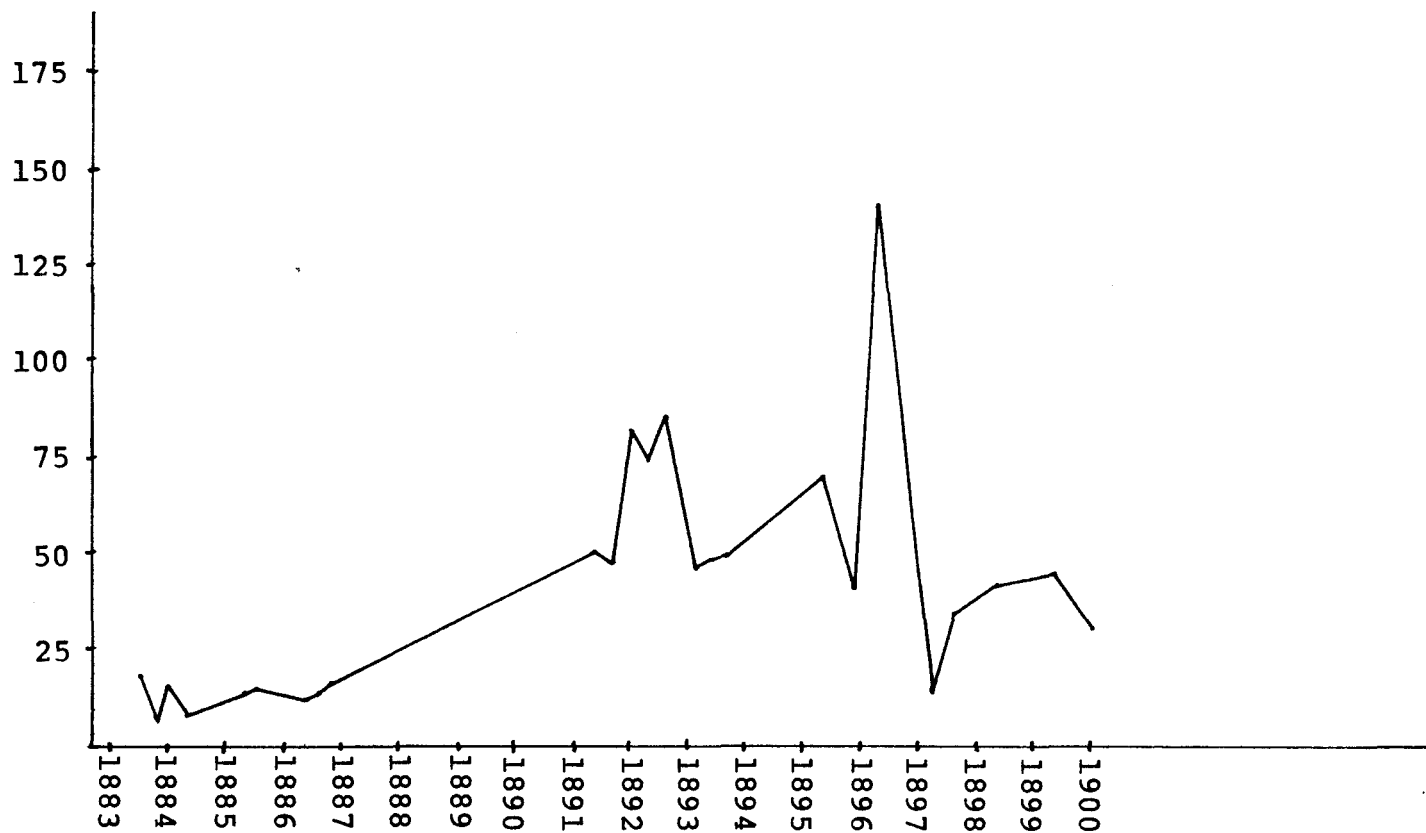
By the mid to late 1890s, signs of both strength and decline of the Fabian Society had appeared. The Executive, always remembering their power base with the membership, had become increasingly concerned with the problem of apathy among the members. The Fabian News and the Minute Books are filled with references to such apathy. This lack of involvement on the part of the general membership was one reason why the Executive proposed the use of mailed ballots in 1894. Furthermore, by the late 1890s almost all correspondence programs, group meetings, and reading circles had been canceled because of the lack of interest among the membership. Fabian News notes in disgust (April, 1899) that of 861 members, only two signed up for the proposed Fabian Book Club, and only one member had paid the fee. From a high point in 1894 both total votes cast in Executive elections and votes cast as a percentage of total membership had been steadily falling (see Figure IX).

After 1896, attendance at meetings of the membership had also fallen. By the late 1890s, it touched the lowest point seen in the previous ten years (see Figure X). One brief respite, that of the October 16, 1896 meeting that solicited 141 votes, was due solely to the controversy surrounding the withdrawal of Tract 70. It should, therefore, be regarded as a fluke.

In addition to the problems which this situation created for the Fabian public image, a clear change in the attitude and aggressiveness of the membership emerges from this period, much to the surprise and detriment of the Fabian Executive. Especially in question was the position of Sidney Webb. It could be argued, in fact, that the increasingly vocal resistance to the traditional policy of the Executive under the domination of Webb permanently crippled the Society and at the same time provided Webb with the incentive to seek political control and prestige outside the strict confines of the Society.

Evidence from the Fabian Minute Books indicates that by early 1897 those few Fabians gathering at the sparsely attended membership meetings had actually begun voting against certain of Webb's resolutions--an unprecedented action in the previous ten years of recorded voting. While there are no recorded instances

FIGURE X
Attendance Records (voting) at Private
Members' Meetings, by year: 1883-1900



of Webb loosing a vote affecting a policy change in the Society between 1887 and 1897, Webb and the Executive did lose several motions from 1897 onwards.¹² Despite the subsequent loss of voting support by the Executive Committee as a whole, the Committee's cohesive core continued to retain sufficient support to ensure their dominance into the early years of the twentieth century. Support waned, however, and splits deepened within the ranks of the membership with the pressing issue of Imperialism which the Society had hitherto avoided; for the Fabian leadership regarded Imperialism, and foreign affairs in general, as unimportant to the citizenry and future of English society and a mere distraction from domestic affairs.

Also contributing to a general malaise of the Society in the course of the 1890s was an apparent decline in member interest in activities of the Society other than voting contests. Subscriptions to the Society's funds, emanating from about 33% of the membership in the early 1890s, continued to fall from the mid 1890s onward. Likewise, forms soliciting membership interest in "doing something" for the Society were returned by only 22% of the membership in 1895. By 1897, only 2% of the membership participated in the Society's sponsored LSE lectures. The Fabian annual dinner, once a

high point in the Society's social calendar, drew a scant 9% of the membership in 1898 and only 8% in 1899.¹³

In reviewing the development of the Fabian membership, both primary and secondary sources agree that members were solicited from the better educated and positioned classes, workers and laborers being avoided. The MacKenzies note as well that the publication of Fabian Essays in 1889 tended to reenforce this selection process by attracting intellectuals, and, to a lesser extent, leaders of the unskilled (or "new") trade unions.¹⁴ With the Fabians' concentration on London events and their lack of attention to the Provincial Societies, the Fabian leadership appeared to be ill-prepared to accept the challenge of serious politics on a national level. Their excessive concentration on rhetoric (noted by MacDonald), together with Sidney Webb's unswerving faith in permeation, made the Fabian leadership feel most comfortable as "cuckoos in someone else's nest."¹⁵ When one adds this to the Society's previously unquantified turnover rate in both Executive Committee and general membership, it is most logical to infer that a small portion of the Executive, supported by an ever decreasing portion of the active membership, could successfully direct the programs and policy of the Society, dissenters being left the alternatives of

accepting this situation or resigning their membership.

FOOTNOTES

¹Cole, Story, p. 51.

²Pugh is an exception to this statement. In her work the issue is skirted by omitting membership figures between 1892 and 1903. The official membership figures of the Society appear as Figure VIII.

³Fabian Society, Annual Report, March 31, 1898, p. 7.

⁴Ibid., March 31, 1900, p. 7.

⁵Ibid.; official accounts limited resignations due to the War Question to "about 15." Cole (see Story) speculates the number was closer to 50 or more. Defaulters numbered "no less than 81" according to official Fabian figures.

⁶See, for example, Aberdeen Journal, February 18, 1896. The Manchester Examiner and Times of September 22, 1890 adds that of the "originators" of the Society, "some of them were poor." The Barnsley Independent, in its story on the Fabians of September 27, 1890, summarized the character of the Fabians that made them most displeasing to both the working class and nation-wide movements, viz: "[The Society] consists of ladies and gentlemen moving in good society in London."

⁷Pease, History, pp. 48 and 63.

⁸For example, Schumpeter, Capitalism, p. 322; Moore, E. Nesbit, p. 77; Clayton, Rise, p. 48; Cole, "Story . . .," in Fabian Journal, p. 7; Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, p. 268. Moore, Clayton, and Cole admit the existence of some working men in the Fabian Society, Clayton qualifying such an occurrence as happening "very occasionally". Hobsbawm as well identifies working men in the ranks of the Fabians.

⁹Cited in Clayton Rise, p. 42.

¹⁰Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, p. 268.

¹¹For the purpose of continuity membership terms of those joining the Fabian Society before 1900 were not tallied past 1900. Although this may skew the membership duration curve toward the low side, it more accurately reflects the properties of the membership for the period from 1884 to 1900.

¹²See, for example, Executive Minute Books for meeting of February 26, 1897, and Fabian News for June and July 1897.

¹³For subscription summaries see Executive Minute Books for December 16, 1892; Fabian News, November, 1895 for solicitation of form responses; Fabian News, August, 1897 for LSE lecture enrollments; Fabian News, March, 1898 and 1899 for dinner attendance.

¹⁴Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, The First Fabians, pp. 148-49.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 236.

CHAPTER VII

FABIANISM OUTSIDE THE METROPOLIS: PROVINCIAL AND GROUP ORGANIZATIONS

The interest of the Fabian leadership in influencing people and events beyond the boundaries of London dates as far back as April, 1884. At that time the Society, barely three months old, approved a resolution whereby persons resident in the country or abroad could be elected to the Society as "corresponding members" upon the proposal of one Fabian personally acquainted with the prospect and being subsequently elected in conformance with already established procedures.¹ By 1886, a "Branches Committee" was operative, recommending that groups of individuals close to London organize on the model of the London Society. Specific recommendations included the local election of Branch Secretaries and Treasurers, reciprocal meeting visitation rights between the London Society and individual Branches (without voting rights), and the establishment of a General Council which would consist of

the Central Executive and delegates from each Branch.² Interest in expanding beyond London was increased at the impetus of Sidney Webb later in the 1880s through the establishment of a committee to promote the work of the Society at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Supported by Edward R. Pease, the measure was passed by the Executive Committee.³ These efforts were later extended to other universities in England, Scotland, and Wales.

By 1890, the Society, largely at the instigation of Sidney Webb, made a firm commitment to methodically build up the local Fabian Societies and expand their influence throughout Great Britain. The initial results, however, were not encouraging. The Society's Annual Report of 1890 noted that even in the close confines of suburban London "except in a few cases, the organization of the Society's London members into local groups has not, as yet, proved at all effective."⁴ The Executive Committee summary continued, noting that most of the Group Secretaries had failed to establish any sort of organization and that Group members had generally failed to keep in contact with the Secretaries of their respective Groups.

It was likely that this dearth of initiative forced the London Executive, in its eyes, to take the

responsibility of promoting organizational development and supplying the ideas and programs which the Fabian Executive leadership thought commensurate with the name of Fabian. This leadership drive developed in earnest by mid 1890, the Executive noting once again that "the disproportion between the Fabian work done in London and in the Provinces is becoming to [sic] serious to disregard."⁵ Decrying reports in The Speaker that Fabianism was weak in the provinces, the Executive proposed several steps which would serve to shore up both the Fabian Society in London as well as related groups outside the metropolis. Specific recommendations included arranging lectures and political addresses, the promotion of Tract and literature sales (at least a portion of the proceeds of which were to be used to pay the travel expenses of Fabian lecturers), and the collection and transmittal of local intelligence to the London Society.

A similar communication went out to the "Groups" the following month complaining of the "complete failure of the Group scheme."⁶ Orders to the London Groups to regenerate life in these organizations included many more suggestions of a scholarly and educational nature, such as to promote the sale of Fabian literature, permeate other associations, monitor the local press, list local

societies and promote lectures, read, discuss, and do work for the cause. By the fall of 1890 some of these remedial steps appear to have been sufficiently effective to bring the work of the Fabians outside of London to the attention of the press; for as far away as Scotland the papers reported that for the first time the London Society of Fabians was attempting to repeat its urban work in outlying areas. The increase in momentum, however, was attributed, at least in this case, to the infusion of money into the Fabian cause, as much as to any spontaneous fervor on the part of the Locals.⁷

An infusion of funds, in fact, was instrumental in supporting the first major lecturing excursion of the Fabians beyond London in the form of the Lancashire Campaign. In evaluating the impact of this campaign on Fabianism, the Society published a one page summary noting its success as being largely due to favorable reports in the press.⁸ This is one example of the Fabian leadership's tendency to regard the press as truly the vox populi, and hence, their desire to control and influence the press as much as possible. The supposed success of the Lancashire Campaign, touted as an attack on the "stronghold of the Old Unionism and the New Toryism," contributed significantly to support earlier efforts to bring the work of the Society beyond the

confines of London; for given the good press and the prospect of growth and influence beyond the metropolis, the report concluded that "at this moment . . . the provincial work of the Society is probably of even greater importance than our London propaganda, and it should, we believe, be developed to the utmost limits which time and funds will allow."⁹

An outstanding example of the Society's dedication to work in outlying areas, as well as their belief in the importance of good press, can be seen in the start-up and continuation of the Fabian News, a consistently money-losing operation, which was undertaken expressly at the request of Provincial Societies and members. While the first issue of the News did not appear until March of 1891, its substance was presaged in a memo (written in Sidney Webb's hand) from Shaw, Webb, and Wallas to the Executive on the subject of the General Elections. In this memo, which specifically referred to "the Provincial (Branch) Societies," closer written links between London and the Provinces were proposed, both to keep those areas informed of each others' activities, and no less important, "to aid in getting . . . information for ourselves."¹⁰ The News filled this order handsomely, soliciting both information from locals, as well as "pointing out to them what books are worthless as well

as what is worthy in new publications."¹¹ This lead was followed by the Southern Group which issued its own circular during the following months in an effort to educate its members and exchange information. This publication, unique in its early days among its local counterparts both in frequency of publication and in content, was anti-S.D.F., pro-unionization (especially of women and the "new unions"), and staunchly London oriented in format and sentiment. Its third issue, in fact, featured a long article by Sidney Webb propounding that "we cannot all lecture or write; but we can all learn what Socialism is. We cannot all be leaders of thought, but we can all be diligent followers of what is thought."¹²

The precise purpose of the local societies is difficult to ascertain completely. It is apparent that one of their functions was to gather information for the London Executive Committee, which, in turn, provided the locals with the fundamentals and interpretations of Fabian doctrine. DeMattos, lecturing in the 1890s, was specifically instructed by the Executive to obtain through the locals the political opinions of all candidates for the 1891 General Elections, by whom "and in what interests the candidates were being run, and by whom or from what sources the necessary funds were being

obtained."¹³ This information was to be forwarded to the London office for evaluation. Concurrently, the Society's official letter of acceptance to new members of the Society informed all such members as to the types of information they were to collect, target groups to be converted to Socialism, and to whom lectures should be addressed and letters written. Lengthy suggestions for London Group work, some outlined above, were also circulated in manuscript form following the failure of the Group scheme early in 1890.¹⁴ Local societies were also regarded as prime access routes into the more populous areas which might be receptive to proposals of municipalization central to Fabian thought. DeMattos' Sunderland lectures of 1891, in fact, proposed such a course, urging "a thorough organization of the workers both for municipal and Parliamentary elections" to rectify the inequities between rich and poor.¹⁵ Further, "he believed that the desired ends would be obtained by national organization and local sections."¹⁶ In addition to such idealized functions, the locals were also useful, especially in Sidney Webb's opinion, as sales outlets "up and down the country" for Fabian Tracts.¹⁷

Another aspect of London-local activities which requires at least some comment is that of political activity. Thus far, it is clear that the emphasis of the

locals, in the mind of the Executive, should be on educational and logistical affairs. Little has been mentioned about political action, primarily because little stress is placed on political action in the sources, especially as far as the Executive was concerned. The emphasis on education versus political action is most strikingly seen in a pamphlet issued by the Manchester and District Fabian Society, allied from its early days with the London Executive:

Men are much like dogs. If you want a dog to follow you, you must teach it to love you, and then it will obey you. If you attempt to drag the dog by its ears against its will, it will resist and bite you. So men. If we want the people to follow us, we must win their love by teaching them. We must open their eyes, their ears, their hearts, and understanding, by reason, argument, and persuasion, and compel them by conviction to accept our doctrines.¹⁸

In general, therefore, the locals received no encouragement in sponsoring or supporting candidates other than admonishments to vote for "the best man." In the case of the London Society, two criteria were important in choosing a candidate for public office: that the candidate have sufficient funds to conduct an effective campaign; and that a prospective candidate be in favor of London reform. It is in convictions such as these that a division of sympathies can be detected between the Central Society and its Provincial associates.

The controversy surrounding the choice of candidates with financial backing began with DeMattos' lecture in Derby, the home of Henry Hutchinson, where he proposed that both old and new unions held the same goals, viz: higher wages, more reasonable hours, and generally better working conditions for the working classes. The difference, he claimed, was that the new unions would not be returning Liberal capitalists or Conservative landowners, but representatives of their own class.¹⁹ Webb countered in a letter to DeMattos a short time later, warning

There is practically no chance whatsoever of a candidate's expenses being found otherwise than locally. For heaven's sake don't let us have a crop of Labour candidates springing up. Who, like the S.D.F. men, cannot possibly go to the polls for lack of funds. The more there are whose election expenses are in the bank the better, but any other sort will only discredit the whole thing.²⁰

This dichotomy of opinion was echoed by the Worcester Fabian Society which held that where social injustices were involved "this state of things can be altered in two ways: either by the rich learning and doing their duty; or by the workers sending men, of their own class, to Parliament."²¹

For Webb, the problem of local candidatures was never satisfactorily resolved. The Society did, on several occasions, establish election funds for promising

candidates of Socialist persuasion;²² but the Society's official position was one of non-intervention in local elections,²³ or, at best, smugness when it came to local versus London affairs. After the 1892 elections Webb confided to Pease

I was delighted at the general results It is simply a gorgeous justification of Fabian electioneering and ought to do something to convince the provincials that our game is the right one--and also give us the control of London politics for the next three years.²⁴

The Society's concern with London reform, frequently to the exclusion of all other considerations, was another issue which nurtured the diverse tendencies of the locals in the '90s. This policy, spearheaded by Webb and supported by the Executive and the London membership at large, was first verbalized early in 1892 and was echoed throughout the remainder of the 1890s.²⁵ Such a posture was in obvious antipathy to many of the provincial groups which were more concerned with the achievement of political power than with the educational subtleties sermonized by the Fabian leadership. In some cases, such as those of Maude, Manchester, Liverpool, and other Fabian Societies, motions were made to exclude from their societies any person "who is, or shall become, an official either of the Conservative, Liberal, Liberal Unionist, or Nationalist League parties."²⁶ While such

policies were disapproved of by the Executive, locals continued to drift in the direction of the S.D.F. and the I.L.P., Liberal and Conservative politics being distasteful to a great number of the Provincial members.²⁷ According to James Bilison, a Fabian active in Local affairs, "the work of a Local Fabian Society would be very little varied from the S.D.F. in practice " by 1983.²⁸ The Fabian reaction to this drifting of sympathies was two-fold: their attempts to control local movements without formal organizational affiliations; and a growing concern with metropolitan and educational questions to the eventual exclusion of most provincial affairs.

The Fabians' interest in provincial affairs was supported originally by a perception that local resources had not been effectively organized and that local interests must concur with metropolitan interests in order to be realized. This position was forcefully presented by Sidney Webb in his "Wanted A Program," which discounted both Home Rule, which lacked support "of the metropolitan constituencies," and the Liberals' "General Council" which "has actually fallen to pieces through sheer lack of local interest."²⁹ To Webb, the solution to Liberal organizational problems was the reconstitution of local organizations "by the help and at the instance

FIGURE XI
Local Fabian Societies*

| | New Societies | Dead | To SDF/ILP | Reported as Active | Reporting no Trouble | Active | net change in numbers |
|------|------------------|------|------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------|--------------------------|
| 1891 | 13 | 0 | 0 | | | 28 | |
| 1892 | 47 | 3 | 3 | 55 | 19 | 74 | 46 |
| 1893 | 13 | 8 | 9 | 27 | 66 | 93 | 19 |
| 1894 | 9 | 5 | 16 | 24 | 78 | 102 | 9 |
| 1895 | 3 | 7 | 3 | 12 | 72 | 84 | (18) |
| 1896 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 11 | 66 | 77 | (7) |
| 1897 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 71 | 77 | 0 |
| 1898 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 52 | 58 | (19) |
| 1899 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 56 | 59 | 1 |

*Sources for this chart include Executive and Members' Meetings Minute Books, manuscript list of active and inactive Fabian Societies (including current status), field reports from Fabian lecturers, official Society correspondence, press clippings, and Fabian News.

of the central body,"³⁰ a project which the Fabians eventually assumed in light of what they understood to be a Liberal vacuum in the provinces. The Liberals' eventual involvement with local reorganization, however, drew especially severe criticism from Fabian analysts during the General Election campaign of 1893. The primary reason for this was the Fabians fear "that unless a special effort is made, the Liberal Party managers may ignore or minimize the demands of London."³¹

Although the Fabians failed to see parallel problems developing in their own situation for another five years, the pull of local versus metropolitan interests was a constant issue of contention which went unchecked and unresolved through the 1890s. While the Fabians tried earnestly to succeed where the Liberal caucus had failed, they were not able to successfully integrate their theoretical goals of a Fabian educated national electorate with the practical reality of operating a London-oriented group.

From the Fabians' first efforts in the provinces, obstacles arose which shook the Society. In the course of their initial campaign, Fabian lecturers and leaders were accused of ignorance of local conditions, propounding erroneous facts and information, and generally attaching "too much importance to themselves,

and to their cause, which at any rate has much to commend it, much wrong, by unduly thrusting their own personalities forward."³² Those groups faithfully following the lead of the London Executive Committee provided an additional spectacle to local activists, striving to "leaven . . . with Tracts and personal interviews . . . then get a room and ask six or eight of the men to tea and a little talk, smoke, and sense."³³ Those groups which clung to the Central Society through the period of growth and tumultuous decline through the 1890s were those which followed the example of London, concentrated on education and municipalization, and eschewed the activism of provincial life. Support for these groups waned in London, however, locals being specifically classified as "extra" beyond the scope of the Society's London work and the Society's budget. Postage was charged for Tracts, minimum orders required, and free distribution of the Fabian News discontinued.³⁴ These moves were followed by "drastic" curtailments of local support, including the cancellation of postage grants, public relations activities, and money grants previously made to the London Groups, discontinuation of the Essex Hall lectures, and the cancellation of free leaflet distribution.³⁵ By 1897, notices of special members' meetings were being sent to London members only,

Provincials having to specifically ask for any notices of meetings at the London office.³⁶ Even Webb, who had enthusiastically initiated and supported much of the provincial work, confided to Pease that

From some words dropped by Clarke, I gather that he feels--as I do--some doubt whether we are quite getting the best value for this Provincial Lecture money; and I should hesitate to extend it.³⁷

One final series of lectures was organized (in addition to the ill-fated Irish campaign)--an attempt to penetrate "the localities where comparatively little has hitherto been done."³⁸ This final drive consisted of one lecturer only and concentrated primarily on large industrial villages and smaller towns. The plan, drafted by Webb and supported by Pease, Oakeshott, and Whelen, proposed a renewal of relationships with the various local Cooperative Societies in establishing lectures. This is a particularly interesting initiative due to the fact that Cooperative involvement with earlier Fabian campaigns was considered by the Executive during these earlier years a primary reason for the failure of the early campaigns.³⁹ The catechism behind this last effort was more explicit than that of previous efforts. The modern message echoed many metropolitan Fabian speakers in proposing a regimented conversion of such hitherto passed over groups as small industrial towns and those places out of the mainstream in the Midlands and

Yorkshire. Although this may superficially appear to be a radical departure from the traditional and well targeted solicitation process of the Fabians, it embodies the attitude of the Society in the years before the Imperialism Question reached critical mass. Observed the Executive,

Thus we hope to produce a more permanent effect than before. . . . Our Society, like the chartered Company in Africa, will capture the hearts of the natives masses , and control them, as the Chartered Company does, for its profit and their own good at the same time.⁴⁰

This insubstantial effort was not well received and was not successful. Indeed, it appears to have signaled the end of the London Fabians' dreams of extending their influence in England beyond the metropolis or outside the Universities. The impact of such a move was immediate, especially in light of the discussions the previous years which touched upon the use of Hutchinson Trust funds for provincial work.

As conscientious administrators, the Executive had formalized their concern with the reversal of Fabian growth by establishing a "Fresh Activities Committee" in 1895. While the Committee did some research on methods of improving both Fabian prospects and morale, the members were contained by the Executive's admonition to contain costs, and, above all, dispel any thought that

Hutchinson Trust funds could be used for supporting the Society's normal work. A compromise was proposed by the Society's "young man in a hurry," J.R. MacDonald, who proposed that £500 to £600 per year be granted by the Trust to bring the Society before the public eye once again, to form public opinion, and to discipline Socialist opinion in general.⁴¹ Financially, the plan was in obvious opposition to the Executive Committee's constraints on expenditures. The plan was also a direct challenge to Sidney Webb, for, as MacDonald proposed,

I am sure if this scheme were announced in the "News" it would be supported by special subscriptions from members who now do not know whether the Society is doing anything except the very harmless thing of publishing the "News". All that would be required would be a guarantee. If this work were launched, the Trustees could be supplied with some more ideas to enable them to spend to some purpose or another £200--still reserving £200 to £300 a year for the School.⁴²

MacDonald's "suggestions" were predictably defeated by a vote of seven to four, two Executive members (Dearmer and Mann) being absent. This did not stop word of it from reaching the provinces where it was greeted with some favor. Differences between MacDonald and the Old Gang deepened, the ensuing three years to his resignation being punctuated with accusations of arm-bending and unreasonableness on both sides.

While efforts were subsequently made by Fabian

Old Gangers to minimize the overwhelming failure of the Fabian missionary movements in both performance and direction, Webb's plans and financial backing for the School continued to grow, Webb sometimes offering positions on the faculty or administrative staff to those who meritoriously defended or fostered the School and its ambitious mission; reminisced Pease

The local Fabian Societies, with rare exceptions, of which Liverpool was the chief, were from the first "ILP" in personality and policy, and were Fabian only in name.⁴³

While this sentiment is transparently a fabrication (especially given the Society's subsequent Irish campaign) it serves to reinforce official Fabian disregard for the provinces by the end of the nineteenth century. The shift in emphasis from the provinces went far deeper, however, if less publicized amid the flap of locals and Imperialism, the Annual Report noting in a closing aside that "in London, the demand for our lectures so far as is known to the officers of the Society has almost ceased."⁴⁴

At the same time, Sidney Webb was beginning to concentrate his efforts in a new arena of political influence, that of the British Universities, having gone so far by 1895 and 1896 as to offer several Universities wholesale admission into the London Society (which

included full membership privileges and voting rights). This accomodation was made "by special arrangement" on the part of the Society's Executive Committee. While there were some remarks from Provincial operatives as to the appropriateness and desirability of this manner of solicitation,⁴⁵ Webb especially continued to concentrate on factions which he believed would best serve the interests of the Fabians as he interpreted them.⁴⁶

The demise of the group system continued into the twentieth century and the Fabian Society, guided by Webb and others of the Old Gang, became increasingly more intellectually isolated from even the daily routine of both new and traditional socialist groups. By 1900, in fact, Fabian influence appears to have been closed out of the London Radical Clubs completely. The Annual Report as early as 1897 reported that

For several years past we have had to report a decreasing demand for our speakers in London, and unfortunately in this respect the present year shows no improvement. We have had very few applications for courses of lectures from the London clubs, and those that have been arranged have frequently been abandoned because no audience has come to hear the lecturer.⁴⁷

The report also indicates that of 180 lectures, local Fabian Societies sponsored 11, or 6%; and of 100 groups receiving books from the Fabians' "Circulating Library," 11 were locals. More active than the locals in both

areas were the S.D.F. and the I.L.P. Although brief attempts were made to at least reconstitute the London area Fabian Groups, such attempts, never really successful, failed once again.⁴⁸

From this point, the only Fabians outside of the central London area who appear on record to have supported and actively worked for the Society were those associated with the Universities. It is to these University, County Council, and Parliamentary Committee groups that the balance of the Society's history and Executive Committee's activities belong. The Provincial System, as it had been planned, was an intriguing concept designed to do in the country at large what the Society at least thought it was doing in London. The tendency of the locals towards electoral activism, their preference for a nation-wide political organization, and their impatience with the "drawing-room Socialists" of London, precluded consolidation even beyond the Central London area. Increasingly the Old Gang drifted apart, the Webbs spending a disproportionate amount of time with their educational efforts and the LSE which they had fostered from concept to reality. Quietly, Sidney Webb, who had considered most of the Provincial members "working men of high grade . . . but not showing any great strength or genius,"⁴⁹ let his idea of a wide-spread system of Fabian

fiefdoms die.

FOOTNOTES

¹Executive Minute Books, April 18, 1884. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²The plan was first aired in an undated 1886 circular (1 page). In this original proposal, one representative for each ten Branch members was proposed. Wallas agreed, but added that two for fifty and three for one hundred or more be the rule: accepted (Executive Minute Books, November 5, 1886. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford).

³Executive Minute Books, April 6, 1888. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴"To the Provincial Members," 2 pages, May 20, 1890. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁵Annual Report of the Fabian Society, March 31, 1890.

⁶Memo to "Group Secretaries," 1 page, June 27, 1890. "Groups" tended generally to define Fabian organizations in the suburban districts of London. Outlying towns and villages were generally referred to as Locals or Provincials, although some mixed use of all these terms occurs.

⁷See, for example, The Scottish Leader, September 4, 1890, which attributes the new drive both to increases in numbers of Fabians and to "a generous donation or two in recognition of its past work."

⁸"Report on the Lancashire Campaign," 1 page, November 4, 1890.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Memo from Sidney Webb, G.B. Shaw, and Wallas to the Fabian Executive Committee, 6 pages, January, 1891.

Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹¹Fabian News, I, March, 1893, p. 3.

¹²Sidney Webb, "On Joining the Fabian Society," Southern Group Circular, III (May 4, 1891).

¹³Executive Minute Books, August 11, 1891.
Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹⁴Other instructions abound, the most significant of which include "What a Member Can Do On Joining the Fabian Society," and the "Fabian Report on the Proceedings at the First Conference of the Fabian Societies Held at Essex Hall, London, 1892." Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹⁵"What Socialism Is," a lecture by DeMattos, in Sunderland Daily Echo," April 24, 1891.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷See "A Fabian-Conservative Alliance? Interview with Mr. Sidney Webb," in Pall Mall Gazette, 1893.

¹⁸R.J. Derfel, "On the Importance of Right Methods in Teaching Socialism," Manchester and District Fabian Society, 15 pages, February 10, 1891, pp. 14-15.

¹⁹"Fabian Lecture" Darby press clippings, April 15, 1892. British Library of Political and Economic Science, London.

²⁰Letter from Sidney Webb to DeMattos, May 6, 1892. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²¹Worcester Fabian Society, untitled pamphlet, 3 pages, February 21, 1894.

²²The Tillet fund was established during February of 1892 in support of his Bradford campaign. Hammill's candidature for Newcastle was supported by a special fund undertaken in May of 1893. Private funds were also established for J.R. MacDonald (1895), Will Crooks (1895), and Keir Hardie (1896).

²³Executive Minute Books, October 12, 1894.
Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²⁴Letter from Sidney Webb to Edward R. Pease, March 6, 1892. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²⁵"It matters not," claimed Webb, "whether a man calls himself a Liberal or Conservative. It is of no concern at this moment whether he is in favour of Home Rule for Ireland or not. . . . All we have to think about is whether he is in favour of all trade union principles in the Government of London." (Sidney Webb, "The County Council Election," Workman's Times, February 20, 1892.)

²⁶Fabian News, December, 1892.

²⁷See Figure XI for defection rates of locals to other socialist bodies (specifically the S.D.F. and I.L.P.). Locals not moving into one camp or the other were effectively dead or dormant and received little or no attention from the London Executive.

²⁸Letter from J. Bilson to Edward R. Pease, January 27, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²⁹Sidney Webb, "Wanted A Program," August, 1888.

³⁰Ibid. See also "Wanted An Organization," a letter from Sidney Webb appearing in the Westminster Gazette, October 3, 1893: "The difficulty is generally not at the electioneering headquarters of the Liberal Party, but in the various provincial organizations."

³¹Untitled circular re: London reform, January 18, 1893.

³²The Oldham Advertiser, November 11, 1890.

³³Southern Group Circular, II, April 22, 1891.

³⁴"The Fabian Society," 1 page, February 8, 1893.

³⁵Letter to the Fabian Membership, July 3, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

³⁶Fabian News, October, 1897.

³⁷Letter from Sidney Webb to Edward R. Pease,

February 7, 1897. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

³⁸Executive Minute Books, April 9, 1897. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

³⁹See, for example, "Report on the Lancashire Campaign," op. cit., where lectures taking place under the auspices of Cooperative Societies, "proved, as a rule, the least successful of the series."

⁴⁰Fabian News, September 1897, p. 25.

⁴¹J.R. MacDonald, "Suggestions for An Expenditure . . .," 2 pages. In Executive Minute Books, June 5, 1896. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Pease, History, p. 102.

⁴⁴Fabian Society, Annual Report, March 31, 1900, p. 16.

⁴⁵Letter from Pankhurst to the Executive Committee, May 19, 1896. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴⁶Letter from Sidney Webb to Edward R. Pease, November 12, 1901. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴⁷Fabian Society, Annual Report, March 31, 1897.

⁴⁸The nominal existence of both the Provincial Societies and the London Groups is bemoaned in the Annual Reports of the Fabian Society for 1890, 1895, and 1900.

⁴⁹Letter from Sidney Webb to an unidentified correspondent, September 18, 1892 (Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford). Hobsbawm (Lesser Fabians, pamphlet in the Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford) notes a decline in the Society between 1895 and 1905, but attributes it to two or more cosmic events: (1) the disillusionment of a great number of socialists from the failure of Capitalism to break up after the 1880s; and (2) the growth of social law as a practical, or perhaps desirable, alternative to social revolution which appeared to be progressively fading as an

alternative.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FABIANS IN PERSPECTIVE

That both Fabian organization and policy were established under the tutelage of the Old Gang should by this point be clear. Prominent as spokesmen of the Society's views, the Old Gang was instrumental in expanding the size of the Executive, in filling its vacancies, and in both establishing committees and selecting their members. The Old Gang, through its control of the Executive and other key committees, was also able to propose programs, control agendas, and, through their control of the various committees, control the content of all editorial and scholarly publications as well as the Society's debates, lectures, propaganda efforts and leaflets, and special projects funded by the Hutchinson Trust. As the effective operating officers of the Society, they could control the appointment of delegates to outside functions (as well as their votes) and could interpret the Society's rules and Basis. Their support both on the Executive Committee and

from the membership assured that protests and challenges would be short lived (as in the Runciman Affair) at least through the late 1890s.

Through the General Secretary (Edward R. Pease), the Old Gang had substantial control over new memberships, for it was the Secretary who could propose a new member without a seconder contrary to the rule applied to other Fabians seeking to nominate new members. In the case of the University Societies, entire groups of new members were initiated into the London Society by fiat, largely at Sidney Webb's instigation. Routine and monetary matters as well were effectively controlled by the informal processing of business, either in special committees or by private agreement.

Although this may not seem standard fare for a group avowedly socialist and initially romantic and idealistic, it represents, perhaps, the reality of small group dynamics and organizational operation. For although there was a core of dedicated workers and financially supportive members, only the steady hand of the Old Gang could direct the group's efforts into the channels suggested primarily by Sidney Webb and his confidants. Neither Webb nor the Old Gang as a whole, however, created the programs or direction of the Society from the ether.

While this point of view may at first seem obvious in the context of the previous chapters, it is worth noting because the question of influence is never clearly and concretely addressed in the secondary literature on the Fabians. The only sources clearly cited as influential in the evolution of Fabian thought in the major secondary works on the Fabians are Francis Place, Maine, and, occasionally Henry George. Furthermore, the role of Maine is probably understated. It seems equally important to postulate the influence of English constitutionalism and the vogue of Darwinism to complete the major background of Fabian development.

As educated and responsible members of the middle and upper classes of English society, the bulk of the Fabian leaders were voracious readers and careful analysts. Although their knowledge of certain historical events and of certain institutions was sometimes incorrect and their interpretations of these phenomena occasionally boardered on the romantic, the Old Gang and their proteges drew on past events and ideas frequently both to justify their own position and to secure it in the context of the Society's perceived destiny. From references in Fabian literature, and especially in the press, to Place, Malthus, Godwin and the like in the 1880s, it appears that the Fabians relied on historical

parallels even before the period of the Lancashire Campaign of the early 1890s when their politics and method were beginning to take form. In published reports of Fabian lectures during this period, for example, almost constant mention is made of the "superior working conditions of the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries."¹ Ignored in this particular instance, however, were such events as the Black Death, the growth of landlordism, and the exclusive nature of the emerging craft guilds, not to mention the fundamental dislocation suffered by the lower classes. Emphasis instead was placed upon the independence and self confidence of the workers which was alleged to have existed, similar to the claims which Marx and Engels made of the late Mediaeval and Early Modern periods as well. A similar type of historical analysis was applied by Sidney Webb in a subsequent series of lectures through which he took a position against the public workshop concept based on the experiences of 1848.²

Of equal if not greater interest is Sidney Webb's and the Fabians' view of power and political responsibility in late nineteenth century England. The Old Gang as a whole paid ceremonial respect to the throne and opposed the abolition of the House of Lords, although they never did address the monarchy as a power or even as

a factor in either lawmaking or ruling and administration. Both the leadership and the membership at large were united on the important and central issue of using constitutional means to affect change in English society. Webb's interest in a highly trained professional civil service of administrators can be understood more easily in this light; for it was his belief that frequently the problems of everyday life for the lower classes lay in the ineffectual administration of extant legislation.³ Likewise, it must be said of the Fabians that despite cases of overt manipulation of members and outsiders alike by the Executive, the broader principle of working within the framework of the English constitution was always respected and assumed, often to the detriment of the Society's growth and influence in both London and the Provinces.

A third aspect of the Fabian Old Gang philosophy involves the amalgamation of Maine and Darwin. Although this is one of the more complex tapestries woven by the Fabian leadership it is central to the growing number of claims throughout the decade of the 1890s that the Fabians were an elite group of upper class pedants who held that their own views were either those of the mass of Englishmen, or, at the very least, should be. Of the secondary sources, only Wiener seems to approach at least

a portion of this argument systematically, claiming that the Fabians' reliance on Maine was manifest in their belief that government had to rely on a special few whose intelligence and ability enabled them to overcome the reign of habit.⁴ The theme that most men did not know their own interests, and that they did not act to secure them, was fundamental to Old Gang theory and is especially transparent in the Diaries of Beatrice Webb. These tenets are explicit in Maine who generally held that the mass of men were unfit to rule. From this type of political philosophy it should not be surprising to find Pease, during the course of an interview by The Church Gazette, referring to the growing electoral power of the masses as the "survival of the unfittest."⁵

While those accusing the Fabians of "elitism" and aristocratic leanings did so for the most part based on statements similar to those cited above, others--notably other serious social reformers--criticised the Fabians on the basis of their plans and platforms and the attitudes those programs engendered. This is probably, in fact, why the Webbs and MacDonald were growing so far apart during the course of the later 1890s, and why the Fabians were all but excluded from the formative actions leading to the birth of the Labour Party. Even Beatrice Webb, no friend of MacDonald or his plans to co-opt Hutchinson

Trust monies for the socialization of England, attributed differences between the Webbs and MacDonald to matters of policy. The issue, simply put by Beatrice Webb, was

To bring about a maximum amount of control in public administration. Do we want to organize the unthinking persons into Socialistic Societies, or to make the thinking persons socialistic? We believe in the latter process.⁶

A similar attitude is alleged to have been held by the "leading Fabians" concerning workers' control in industry. In this case, the point was made that workers' self governing workshops lacked managerial ability, knowledge of the marketplace, and the discipline necessary for efficient production.⁷ To the Fabians, the reason for this particular problem lay in the circumstances of the masses, for it was clear to them that any intellectual concepts which may prove useful for the furtherance of mankind could not possibly thrive in the rank environment of the lower classes. Consequently, any thought-provoking or reformist ideas could only be developed and constructed in the minds of those better off "who had sufficient leisure and education to think of other things than breadwinning."⁸

Given attitudes of this sort which prominent Fabians held (with the support of a majority of the membership) it seems almost natural that a Fabian philosophy would insist upon the reeducation of society

in its own image. This is one of the projects that evolved through the 1890s especially with Sidney Webb and the other Fabian leaders. It also gave rise to some conflict both within and outside of the Fabian Society. It was the issue of educational reform, in fact, which split Sidney Webb and Graham Wallas and isolated Webb to a large degree from Progressive and clerical support among the Nonconformists by the turn of the century. For Sidney Webb, the passage of the years led to the conclusion that a very pragmatic, regimented, and effective means of government administration had to be constructed. While his original concern was that of raising the level of general living and educational standards, it evolved into the formation of an almost caste-like division of tasks. Thus while Wallas came to believe that the new conditions of the Fabians' Great Society would require all its members to cope with abstract intellectual material, Webb came to believe that educational systems should concentrate on gifted prospects, dividing secondary education into "intellectual" and "vocational" elements. Not coincidentally Webb also tended to associate the source of his gifted prospects with the middle and upper strata of society.

Webb's tendency, not surprisingly, was to consider a working class education a vocational one.

Summarized Webb:

It is not their business to lead up to any higher school, but to the counting house, the factory or the kitchen . . . a more important work, . . . that of educating the mass of ordinary average children for the ordinary average life.⁹

It was not until 1900 and the onslaught of the Imperialism issue that "education" was downplayed and other issues, such as foreign affairs, emphasized.¹⁰ This still did not quell member and public discontent especially with Webb and the Fabian leadership who had on previous occasions publically accused the membership at large of such breaches as having a "low standard of civic intelligence,"¹¹ "inability to comply with the apparently simple voting instructions," and "ignorance on economic subjects."¹² Webb's demand for expert administration consisting of armies of professional reformers was foreshadowed, however, by forms that maddened other reformist bodies. One theme, strummed since the early 1890s, was worker apathy. A case in point was Webb's tirade on the 1891 School Board Elections on which he commented (in an attempt to rally votes for the 1892 County Council election) that "They will have no one but themselves to blame, if London continues to be plundered and oppressed, exploited and robbed for the benefit of pirate capitalists."¹³ Such expressions of concern for the lower classes did not result in any appreciable

increase in lower class involvement. It may, in fact, have served to confuse many less educated workingmen as far as goals of the Fabian Society were concerned and the role its leadership had chosen for those less fortunate than the majority of the Fabian membership.

Workingmen were supposed to get out and vote, to be sure, but most were not expected, in Fabian eyes, to be candidates. Instead, the working classes were to vote for the most qualified candidates standing, such candidates having already been subjected to examinations and public questioning periods to gain Fabian endorsement. It was Webb's claim that "the work of the council is heavy, and members receive no payment for their time, . . . I am afraid, therefore, that we must be content in many places with Labour representatives who do not themselves work with their hands."¹⁴ Sidney Webb's expressions of Fabian superiority were clearly a matter of record from the 1880s through the Imperialism imbroglio of 1900. In one of his earliest position papers, Webb concludes "it is not enough that we of the middle and upper classes"¹⁵ This image had already been picked up by the press, however, and had been developed to the point that by the same period a popular profile of the Fabians had begun to emerge. Typical of the many descriptions was that of the

Hampstead Express observing that "the Fabian Society, it appears, consists mainly of members of the educated classes, and is disparaged by the other sections of the Socialist party as a middle class affair."¹⁶ Webb tried to show that the Fabian Society was not exclusively by and for the interests of the middle and upper classes on several occasions,¹⁷ but the press and populace continued to label the group middle class well into the 1890s when the Fabians themselves dropped their pretenses to being working class oriented.

Considering the transparently elite nature of the Fabian Society's leadership and its goals, it should be sufficient, in addressing the subject of elitism, to note that the collusive and complete control of the Society by the Executive--especially the Old Gang--follows the classic definition of an elitist organization.¹⁸ It is in the actions of Sidney Webb and the Executive Committee, of course, that most indications of elitism can be found. Mention has been made already of the contempt in which the lower classes were held, especially by the Webbs. Mention has also been made of the circumstances of the founding of the London School of Economics and Political Science which could in no way be interpreted as egalitarian. As early as 1893 Sidney Webb himself began to develop strong tendencies of self

importance which, combined with Fabian platforms, serve to further illustrate the Fabian Webb's turn of mind:

I asked once before he wrote to Pease that you should treat me like a Cabinet Minister--put the whole matter before me in apple pie order. It seems a good deal to ask, but I fear that I am too occupied other ways at present to work on any other terms.¹⁹

The Executive's concurrence that society should be managed by those best educated to do so also accounts for the popularity of Fabianism in and around London and other large cities such as Liverpool and Manchester where there was a proportionately large, educated, and professional middle class. Even those groups and locals which did solicit working class participation did so on the premise that they would attract "an aristocracy of heart and intellect of and from workers."²⁰

Such attitudes did not go unnoticed by contemporaries involved in the Socialist movement. It is reasonable to conclude, moreover, that Fabian attitudes were equally if not more responsible than the Fabian Society's composition for the Society's exclusion from meaningful socialist and working class endeavors into the twentieth century. An especially sarcastic newspaper article aimed at the Fabians makes precisely this point, noting that "Fabian prejudice versus democracy and in favor of the 'expert' peeps out here and there."²¹

Joseph Clayton, a contemporary of the Fabians not

altogether unsympathetic to the movement, summarized his impressions as follows:

In the early and most interesting days of Fabianism, its chief champions, known as 'the four,' were Sidney Webb, Shaw, Olivier, and Wallas. . . . The trouble indeed with Fabianism was that it became almost too brainy; it used to remind me of Sydney Smith's remark about some one who was all mind--that 'his intellect was indecently exposed'.²²

Wiener unconsciously carries matters a step further in characterizing H.G. Wells as typical of Pease's "young man in a hurry." For in describing Wells as one who "perceived the new ruling class emerging in the form of a scientific-technological-managerial elite, at present almost indistinguishably mingled with the rest of society,"²³ he suggests that some of those most strongly opposed to Old Gang control and methods were only carrying Old Gang concepts from the realm of ideas onto the field of action.

While such a view may be difficult to support with specific and irrefutable illustrations, there can be no doubt that the Fabians were a positive force in early labor politics and specifically in the reform of the larger urban political apparatus of the time. In assessing the Fabians' contributions, however, it is important to separate the actual from the totally imagined. The prolific "public relations" articles and books (including those studies of the Society by Pease,

Cole, and Pugh) churned out by the Group over the decades include some claims far too ambitious to be verified or believed. Some of these self-planted and self-promoted achievements may include the alleged defeat of Blatchford's Manchester Fourth Clause,²⁴ the permeation of government during 1885-1892 as seen in the County Government Act,²⁵ and the formation of the L.R.C. at least partially on Fabian initiative.²⁶ Equally bold was the Fabian claim (in Tract 41) that the Society was responsible for the conversion of the Clarion and the Sunday Chronicle to socialism. In response to the latter claim Blatchford himself forcefully rejected it in a letter to E.R. Pease, admonishing him to restrain himself in his ardor. "Claim as much credit as you please, advertise your own work as much as you please, but let us possess our own souls in peace."²⁷ The pomposity of Fabian claims was mirrored as well in the radical press where Ben Gardner, a popular London columnist mused that

If I ridiculed Sidney Webb and others, it was because Shaw modestly claimed that he and Webb had metamorphosed the face of the English political earth, and so laid himself open to be smiled at.²⁸

Such claims were still being voiced into the twentieth century as exemplified by Pease's claim that the Fabians had converted "the other Socialist bodies from violence and revolution to municipalization."²⁹

More a tribute to their propagandizing skills

rather than their braggadocio are the Fabian inferences of influences which secondary writers have naively assumed as fact. Worthy of inclusion in this category are such assertions that the Fabians spread socialism not only throughout Britain, but throughout the world;³⁰ or that the Fabians were a substantial influence behind European Revisionism, especially through their "education of Eduard Bernstein and other leading exiles" in London.³¹ Shaw, in writing in the 1940s, seems honestly convinced that the Fabian founders destroyed the "immense prestige and authority of Cobdenist Liberalism We really did knock laissez-faire into a cocked hat."³² Even Pelling, usually careful on the tightrope of cause and effect, appears unduly influenced by the claims of Shaw and Pease especially, claiming that "the Fabian Society performed the essential service of adapting Marxist theory to a form compatible with British constitutional practice."³³

At the furthest end of this spectrum are those such as Middleton, who claims that the Fabians' influence is just too great to be measured,³⁴ and Crane, who enumerates such Fabian offspring as the government of the United States, the destruction of the Liberal Party in Great Britain, the destruction of the influence of the I.L.P., and the Fabians' "enormously successful" policy

of permeation.³⁵ While there are additional examples of both self-proclaimed and assumed cases of Fabian influence, there were certainly some areas in which the Fabians made positive and largely identifiable contributions. Their dedication to the publication of literature and their efforts to educate all segments of society need no further elaboration; for there was probably no contemporary group which so systematically attacked the collection and circulation of statistics and opinion as did the Fabians. Fabian involvement in politics at the local level has also been well known, at least among specialists in the fields of socialism and labor history. The Commonwealth Library of 1893, in fact, lists no fewer than a dozen local bodies on which the Fabians had representation,³⁶ while local candidates and officials on at least two documented occasions went directly to the Old Gang for counsel and instructions.³⁷ Fabian involvement in educational reforms has also been widely admitted.

On the national scale, evidence of Fabian influence can be seen in at least two cases, viz: the Liberal Government Legislation of 1906 and the Minority Report of 1909. The latter Report, however, a strong motivating factor in the subsequent Poor Law Bill, was primarily the work of Beatrice Webb. Speculating

further, it could be argued that the Fabians (and the Webbs in particular) desired to organize and control a vast network of civil servants, implying an equally vast reserve of wealth to compensate those guardians of the people's welfare. Perhaps this reserve, recognized as necessary but never voiced, lay behind the Fabians' emphasis on principles of taxation, municipalization, and the equalization and expropriation of land by the legally constituted authorities of the government. Shaw touched upon this area as well, implying both that there was a need to raise the wage base, and that land and wealth would be taken by the state, which would in turn pay some undefined quit-settlement amount to the holders. Whether or not such long range plans prevailed, at least before the birth of the London School of Economics, cannot be confirmed by known documentation. Sidney Webb did confirm in 1892, however, that

My view is not that socialism is some kind of heaven but that it is a principle of action.³⁸

There is no evidence to indicate that the early Fabians had any firm goals or organization in mind when their society was established. The content and orientation of the Essays published only a few years later, in fact, suggests quite the opposite. The only thing that was clear to them was that injustices were evident in society, and that "practical measures" were necessary in

order "to secure the general welfare and happiness."³⁹ During the ensuing two years, volumes of notebooks were filled and hours of discussions undertaken in an effort to resolve the critical questions of purpose and organization. The result of these intellectual exercises was the issuance of a "Basis" for the Society together with a charter of organization and operation.

The "Basis" set forth goals such as the community ownership of resources, the elimination of "the idle class," and practical equality of opportunity through the implementation of Socialist principles. The object of such a document was to set forth general aims to the public while allowing sufficient latitude of opinion to induce the literate public to take out membership in the group. The actual development of Fabian opinion, goals, and methods is considerably more difficult to follow. The most succinct summary is to be found in the lectures of Sidney Webb, where he is alleged to have claimed that "what we Fabians aim at is not the sub-division of property land and capital . . . but the control and administration of it by representatives of the community and taxes to build the wealth of the state."⁴⁰

Fabian goals of the 1890s, however, were considerably more vague, George Standring noting that the Fabians were collectivists dedicated to the regulation of

production and consumption.⁴¹ Edward R. Pease, in an article appearing later that year, confirmed that, indeed, the goal of Fabian Socialism was to ensure the "equitable distribution of the products of industry."⁴² In the same article, a hint of means and ends appears in his assessment that the best way to accomplish the ultimate goal would be by the constitution of a democratic parliament, the nationalization of land, and the nationalization of capital. These actions, according to Pease, could be realistically accomplished through influencing those who were most powerful in parliament and through the dispersal of political propaganda to convince constituencies that thrusting reform down people's throats against their will would only hinder progress.

It was not until the ensuing years, and the admission of Sidney Webb to the Society, that more specific and aggressive plans were formulated. Thus by the early 1890s, such secondary goals were established as the revision of taxation, extension of the Factory Acts, educational reform, reorganization of the Poor Law Administration, the extension of municipal activity, and the amendment of existing political machinery to include a central executive, nationalized utilities and services, and "control of London politics" in the general elections.⁴³

Most of Webb's grandiose plans, however, were not destined to materialize. The Daily Chronicle, editorializing in 1894, noted harshly that "permeation had absolutely and ludicrously failed."⁴⁴ Webb's response, guardedly supported by a vocal minority of Executive Committee members, was to press the role of the "expert," thereby attempting to neutralize any criticism leveled at him by his opponents. In one particularly heated lecture, Webb went to the extreme of likening the legislative process to shoemaking; a poor field in which to encourage amateurs, for "even to criticise or judge a law is necessarily beyond the capacity of any amateur."⁴⁵ According to Webb, electors can judge results, but should not involve themselves in such mockeries as referenda or initiatives which, according to him, destroy administrative efficiency, and, therefore, seriously injure the national well-being. "The elector knows where the shoe pinches but is not competent to advise on the best method of securing relief, and seldom desires to do so."⁴⁶

Webb's insistence upon channeling the Fabian Society's work into more exclusively academic pursuits, including the massive underwriting of the LSE, cost him dearly in terms of political support as well. Olivier, once a strong Old Gang supporter, campaigned against Old

Gang activities extensively in the latter 1890s, bemoaning the Society's drift away from what he perceived as being the pressing issues of the day. Sam Hobson, an influential and long-standing member of the Society and the Executive as well, also registered his concern: "We have ceased to be feared and are only respected as amiable and harmless students of certain restricted social phenomena."⁴⁷ His concern echoed that of other members as well who were deeply worried about the growth of other socialist bodies at the expense of the Fabians, especially the increasingly popular I.L.P. The blame for this condition was more than once placed squarely at the feet of "the responsible Fabian leaders" who he fully felt controlled the destiny of the Society.⁴⁸

Clearly the actions of Sidney Webb and at least a portion of the Old Gang represent a change in posture with the dawn of the present century. Webb's departure from provincial development, the Civil Service, and even permeation, and his concentration instead on massive reeducational programs boded more than a shift in Fabian emphasis and means. There are some, indeed, who hint that this period represents a fundamental shift from gradualism to "ends justify the means" tactics.⁴⁹ Another scholar to observe a shift in Webb's attitude was Ensor, who in 1900 reports asking Webb why he left the

Civil Service. According to Ensor, Webb replied that the longer he was in it, the more clearly he realized the existence of a great gulf between two orders of men--the civil servants who carry out policies and the politicians who as Ministers determine them. Webb further complained that however influential a civil servant might become, his position precluded, as a rule, his initiating large changes, such as a socialist policy would involve.⁵⁰

As Clayton, and even Bland, would note some time later, the Fabianism of the "Basis" was dead. Fabianism lingered on, through the tumultuous period of near-reform involving H.G. Wells and Guild Socialism under the impetus of G.D.H. Cole. Two decades later, however, Webb, at least, appears to have found his niche as President of the Board of Trade--replete with silk topper.⁵¹

FOOTNOTES

¹E.g. the lectures of Webb and DeMattos, in North Cheshire Herald, January, 1891 and The Chronicle, January 24, 1891.

²Daily Chronicle, November 19, 1892.

³See for instance his lecture of November, 1892, bemoaning the neglect of home workers which he attributed to the Secretary of State's failure to carry out the

provisions of the Factory Act, in the Daily Chronicle, November 19, 1892.

⁴Wiener, Two Worlds, p. 75. The role of the human will was perceived as being a powerful force; this can be seen especially in the works of Shaw and the Webbs.

⁵Interview with Edward R. Pease, in The Church Gazette, January 20, 1900.

⁶Beatrice Webb, Diaries, cited in Cole, Story, p. 75.

⁷McBriar, Fabian Socialism, pp. 100-101; see also Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, p. 127.

⁸Edward R. Pease, History, p. 19. See also G.B. Shaw, "Illusions of Socialism," in Forecasts of the Coming Century, edited by Edward Carpenter (London: 1897) where it is proclaimed that the chief obstruction to the advance of socialism is "the stupidity, the narrowness . . . of all classes, and especially of the class which suffers most by the existing system."

⁹Cited in Wiener, Two Worlds, p. 138.

¹⁰Fabian Society, Annual Report, March 31, 1900.

¹¹See the Fabian Society's Southern Group Circular, No. 1, April 6, 1891, p. 1.

¹²Members' Meeting, Fabian Minute Books, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹³Sidney Webb, "The London County Council Election," in Workman's Times, January 9, 1892.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Sidney Webb, "The Progress of Socialism," January, 1888.

¹⁶"Socialism in Hampstead," in Hampstead and Highgate Express, November 5, 1887.

¹⁷E.g. "The Fabian Society and the City Council," in the Daily Chronicle clippings from 1887. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

¹⁸The best review of secondary literature on elites is Dankwart H. Rustow's "The Study of Elites: Who's Who, When and How," in World Politics, XVIII (1966), 690-717. Some other individual studies include Gerant Parry, Political Elites (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1969) and T.B. Bottomore, Elites and Society (Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1964).

¹⁹Letter from Sidney Webb to Edward R. Pease, April 22, 1893. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²⁰Fabian Society, East London Group, Annual Report, March 30, 1892.

²¹Justice, November 19, 1898.

²²Cited in Joseph Clayton, History of Socialism, p. 41, f.n. 1.

²³Wiener, Two Worlds, p. 78.

²⁴Attributed to George Bernard Shaw in Cole, The Webbs and Their Work, pp. 10-11.

²⁵Cole, Ibid., pp. 10-11.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Letter from Robert Blatchford to Edward R. Pease, August 14, 1892. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

²⁸Benjamin Gardner, "The Fabians and the Unemployed," in Workman's Times, December 31, 1892.

²⁹Interview with Edward R. Pease, "A Chat With the Secretary of the Fabian Society," in The Church Gazette, January 20, 1900.

³⁰Mary E. Murphy, "The Role of the Fabian Society in British Affairs," in Southern Economic Journal, XIV (July, 1947), 16.

³¹Cole, Story, p. 346; McBriar, Fabian Socialism, p. 71.

³²George Bernard Shaw, "Fabian Successes," in Fabian Quarterly, No. 41 (April, 1944).

³³Henry Pelling, Origins, p. 218. Pelling also stresses cooperation between Marxists and Fabians especially as regards the labor movement (pp. 117 ff.).

³⁴J.S. Middleton, "Webb and the Labour Party," in The Webbs and Their Work, ed. by Margaret Cole, p. 168.

³⁵Philip M. Crane, The Democrat's Dilemma (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1964), pp. vii-ix, 28, 37 ff.

³⁶Included was representation on the School Boards of London, Newcastle-on-Tyne, and Bristol; on the Town Councils of Bristol and Darlington; the Trade Councils of Newcastle and London; the London Board of Conciliation; the Dock Labourers; the Trade Union Executive; the National Liberal Club; and the Metro-Radical Federation.

³⁷Will Crooks (in a letter to E.R. Pease accompanying a clipping on the Council agenda, May 16, 1896) claiming "if not in the exact words of those you sent me I think near enough to get what we desire;" and E. Williams (in a letter to Pease of August 17, 1897) petitioning "Mr. Harmsworth has asked to look after the School Board election for the Daily Mail. The programme will of course be announced. Would you give me anything that will help me to train the Mail readers in the way they should go?" Both letters in Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

³⁸Sidney Webb, "The Labour Movement," in Daily Chronicle, November 18, 1892.

³⁹Executive Minutes, November 23, 1883 and January 4, 1884. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴⁰Beatrice Webb, Our Partnership, pp. 105 ff. This statement, cited as well by Cole, is alleged to have come from an 1894 lecture on Fabian history. Cole (p. 75) interprets Beatrice Webb's statement as meaning that the Fabian goal was "to bring about a maximum amount of control in public administration."

⁴¹George Standring, "What Socialism Is," in The Republican, June, 1896.

⁴²Edward R. Pease, in The Newcastle Daily

Telegraph, October 14, 1896.

⁴³See Sidney Webb, Wanted a Program, August, 1888; Fabian Society, Annual Report, March, 1890; Webb lecture reported in Manchester Examiner and Times, September 23, 1890; letter from Sidney Webb to Graham Wallas, November 3, 1893 (Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford); "The Sphere of the Municipality in Industrial Reconstruction," in Fabian News, December, 1895.

⁴⁴Daily Chronicle, January 15, 1894.

⁴⁵Sidney Webb, "Primitive Expedients," reported in Fabian News, November, 1896.

⁴⁶Ibid. This view is supported in principle by Wallas in his lecture "Representative Government," cited in Wiener, Two Worlds, p. 45.

⁴⁷Letter from S.G. Hobson to Sydney Olivier, October 24, 1899. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford. Typical of Olivier's view is his three page letter to Edward R. Pease of October 16, 1899 located in the same archives.

⁴⁸S.G. Hobson, "Memorandum on the Shaw Draft," n.d. probably 1900. Fabian Archives, Nuffield College, Oxford.

⁴⁹Notable among such critics are Woolf (Webbs and Work, p. 258) and Crane (Democrat's Dilemma, pp. 30-31). Royden Harrison, in his paper "The Young Webb, 1859-1892," summarized in the Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, 15-18, detects in Webb's compulsion to become a successful and leading Fabian his need for security and fear of poverty.

⁵⁰Ensor, Webbs and Work, p. 60. Another factor, noted above, may have been Webb's failure to obtain rapid promotions within the framework of the Civil Service.

⁵¹See picture in Cole (ed.), Webbs and Work, p. 209.

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The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven Connecticut. Contains letters by and to George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, etc. Also housed in the University Library are the Thomas Davidson Papers which contain correspondence with Edward Aveling, Belfort Bax, William Clarke, Sidney Webb, and others.

British Library of Political and Economic Science (London School of Economics and Political Science). Home of the Wallas, Passfield, and Shaw Papers. Also there are Pease's manuscripts including the draft to his History of the Fabian Society (with comments by Webb and Shaw). Also useful are five volumes of Fabian handbills, programs, and press clippings of local Fabian Societies.

British Library, British Museum, London. Holds several printed pamphlets, clippings, and annual reports of the Fabian Society as well as a sizable collection of Shaw Papers. The Newspaper Library also has a complete collection of harder to obtain periodicals. Some available on microfilm include The Star, The Clarion, Workman's Times, Justice, and the Labour Leader.

A. Mattison Collection, Brotherton Library, Leeds. Included in this corpus are cuttings from the local and regional press covering the transition of the local Fabian Society to the I.L.P. Also there are reference materials helpful in tracing the careers of William Morris, Edward Carpenter, and others.

The Nettelau Collection, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Most useful in this collection as far as the Fabians are concerned are the letters especially of Webb and

Morris.

Nuffield College, Oxford. Nuffield's Library is now the chief repository of the Fabian Archives and Papers. Included are Minute Books of the Executive and other Committees; papers, programs, and outlines of other Fabian Groups (including Locals, the Women's Group, summer schools, etc.); and boxes of correspondence, photographs, and clippings dealing with the Central Society as well as some of the Locals and London Groups.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

Committee System Organization, Approved April 22, 1890

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

To meet monthly (First Tuesday at 5 p.m.)

Monthly notice of meeting to be sent (with any important agenda) to each member: stating also particulars of all Sub-committee meetings fixed.

To have sole power:

a of issuing anything on behalf of the Society

b of spending anything over L1

c of bringing propositions before Society

SUB-COMMITTEES

That three permanent Sub-committees be appointed,

a Literature and publishing

b Political and Lecture

c Finance and General Purposes

Each to meet usually once a month and oftener if required.

That 5 members be specially nominated to each Sub-committee, and be held responsible for its work - but that all members of the Executive be entitled to attend any Sub-committee meeting if desired.

That the business of the Sub-committees be as follows:

Literature and publishing

To manage the issue of the Society's publications: to promote sales and literature: and to devise new tracts &c.

Political and Lecture

To suggest and coordinate the political action of the Society and its members: to promote the Society's political influence: and to manage the Lecture work.

Finance and General Purposes

To administer the finances: to promote the Society's fortnightly and social meetings: to supervise the administration of members: and general business.

That no Sub-committee have the power to issue anything of behalf of the Society, or to incur any expense in excess of L1 at a time, without the previous sanction of the Executive Committee.

That minutes be kept of all Sub-committee meetings and that a brief abstract of these minutes for the month be read at each meeting of the Executive Committee, for the information of its members.

That members be allotted to the various Sub-committees as follows with power to each to attend the other meetings:

Finance and General Purposes (meeting 4th Tuesdays)

H. Bland (Treasurer)
E. R. Pease (Secretary)
Miss Grover
Rev. S. D. Headlam
W. S. DeMattos

Political and Lecture (meeting 3rd Tuesdays)

Mrs. Besant later crossed out
S. Webb
G. B. Shaw
Mrs. Mallet
R. E. Dell

Publishing and Literature (meeting 2nd Tuesdays)

S. Olivier
W. Clarke
G. Wallas
Miss Hoatson
J. F. Oakeshott

Other incidental Rules changed or added during the April '90 Meeting are as follows:

- That in Rule 9 the words "on personal acquaintance" be expunged.

- That in Rule 3 the second clause insofar as

refers to "other Committees," be expunged.

- That the Executive Committee be charged with the duty of appointing Committees for special purposes.¹

Additional Rule, viz:--

Whenever it is desired to appoint a Special Committee of the Society, other than the Executive Committee, to draw up a report to the Society on any matter, such Committee may be appointed either by the Executive Committee, or by the Society at any ordinary meeting, provided that fourteen days' notice shall be given to the Secretary by the member moving for such committee, of the purpose of the Committee, and the names of the members to be nominated by him. Notice of this motion, including the names of the members nominated, shall be sent to the members but the Society shall have power to amend the terms of the motion, and to nominate additional members.

- That the Executive be instructed to make arrangements for holding once a quarter a social meeting for the members.
- To remove the words "pay--be", and insert "make a contribution to the funds of the Society prior to his election, the amount being."²
- "No alteration of, or addition to, the Basis shall be made until it has been adopted, after due notice given, by a vote of more than three-fourths of the members present at an annual meeting, and confirmed by a similar vote at a special private meeting held after an interval of not less than six months."
- Rule 3 (line 1)--Alter "at" to "before"; and add: "Voting papers shall be sent to all members, together with the April number of the NEWS, and they shall be returned to the General Office on or before April 20. Two scrutineers shall be appointed by the Secretary, whose duty it shall be to open the ballot-box, to count the votes, and to certify to the General Secretary before April 23, for publication in the NEWS, the numbers of votes

polled. The new Executive shall come into office on April 25. In case of Easter occurring about the dates named, the Executive may alter them, giving due notice thereof; but no alteration shall exceed seven days. In case of a tie there shall be a second ballot at the annual meeting, only those present voting."

- Rule 7--Add: Clause 2.--"When a requisition of urgency, signed by not less than fifty members, is presented to the General Secretary, calling for a private meeting to discuss a specific notice of motion, he shall summon such meeting to discuss a specific notice of motion, he shall summon such meeting for a date within fourteen days from the receipt thereof, and shall within seven days notify the same to all members, by circular or otherwise."

Rule 1--Add: "or as provided in Rule 7, Clause 2."

- The Executive Committee may at any time refer any question to the decision of the whole Society, the voting to be by letter. Any mover of a resolution which, at a meeting of the Society, has been supported by not less than fifty members, may claim a poll of the whole Society, the voting to be by letter."

FOOTNOTES

¹There was later some negative reaction on the part of certain members of the Society to the matter of "special meetings"; for it was felt that the Executive provided for such meetings in order to make decisions away from the eyes of the rest of the Society. Some discussion of the matter appears in various Minute Books. In the Fabian Archival holdings (Nuffield College, Oxford), there is also a long letter from Miss Brooke to E. R. Pease on this subject (dated March 9, 1894).

²The fee mentioned in the April, 1893 Fabian News was 5s as an entrance fee; "amount to be refunded if candidate not elected to membership." The fee is

reported in the May News, however, as "not being carried." Here it is reported that "the amount should be left open, but a compulsory initiation fee agreed."

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

Rules proposed by Executive Committee
at 1892 Annual Meeting

1. The words "due notice" shall mean that the notice is received by the General Secretary before the 23rd day of any month for publication in the next issue of FABIAN NEWS.
2. A public meeting shall mean a meeting to which non-members are admitted. A private meeting shall mean a meeting confined to members of the Society.
3. At the first meeting in April of each year the Society shall elect by ballot an Executive Committee of fifteen members and a Treasurer to hold office for one year. Due notice shall be given of all nominations for these offices. The Executive Committee shall fill any vacancies which occur during its year of office.
4. It is the duty of the Executive to conduct the general business of the Society, to appoint the paid officers, to prepare tracts, and to appoint delegates to represent the Society, and committees for special purposes.
5. Resolutions of which due notice has been given shall be placed on the agenda of the first private meeting of the Society after such notice has been published. Resolutions shall not be moved without due notice, except after a vote of urgency has been carried.
6. Any resolution, not affecting the constitution of the Society, its rules or its basis, may be declared urgent by a majority of three-fourths of the members present, in a meeting of not less than twenty-five members, and, if so declared, shall be discussed and voted upon forthwith.
7. When a requisition signed by not less than twenty-five members is presented to the General Secretary, calling for a private meeting to discuss any resolution, the Executive Committee shall order the resolution to be

printed in FABIAN NEWS, and shall appoint for the meeting the earliest convenient date thereafter.

8. Except in cases of emergency, notice shall be given by the Executive Committee, either in FABIAN NEWS or by special circular, of any tracts to be proposed to be issued by the Society, and every tract shall be submitted to the members at a private meeting, and shall only be published when adopted by that meeting.

In cases of emergency a tract may be adopted at any private meeting upon a vote of urgency.

9. London Members. Candidates resident within the area of the London Groups must sign a declaration that they accept the basis of the Society, must attend two meetings as visitors, and must be proposed and seconded by members from personal knowledge. The names of all candidates shall be printed in FABIAN NEWS every month, and they shall not be elected before the second meeting of the Executive Committee after such publication. The proposer and seconder must sign the nomination paper, and must each forward a letter to the Secretary stating that the candidate is a Socialist, and likely to be a useful member of the Society. Candidates shall be elected by unanimous vote of the Executive Committee. If a candidate be rejected his proposer shall have the right of appeal to the Society, in which case a ballot shall be taken at a private meeting, with due notice given, when one black ball in five shall exclude.

Candidates who cannot qualify by attending the public meetings of the Society may attend meetings of the Group in whose area they reside, and on the recommendation of the Secretary of the Group, two such attendances shall be deemed to qualify.

The Executive Committee may by unanimous vote, for special reasons, suspend such parts of this rule as specify qualifications for membership, except that part which requires acceptance of the Basis.

10. Provincial Members. Any candidate resident outside the London district must sign the declaration of acceptance of the Basis, and must be proposed by one member. Such candidates are not required to attend two meetings prior to election.

11. Members who do not take part in the work of the Society or subscribe to its funds during one year may

be removed from the list of members at the discretion of the Executive Committee.

12. A member may be expelled from the Society by a vote of more than three-fourths of the members present at a meeting of not less than twenty-five members. Due notice of the motion shall be given to the General Secretary; but such notice shall not be valid and shall not be printed in the NEWS without the sanction of the Executive.
13. Members are expected to subscribe to the funds of the Society in accordance with their means.
14. The members resident in or near London shall, for the purpose of local work, be divided by the Executive Committee into Groups according to the parliamentary constituencies in which they reside. Each group shall elect a secretary, who shall keep a list of the Group members, and who shall organize the work of the Group. He shall have power to call upon the General Secretary to pay any sum not exceeding L2 in one year for postage and other expenses.

The Group Secretary shall be removable by a vote of the Group, or by a vote of the Society after due notice has been given.

A meeting of any Group may be summoned either by the Group Secretary or by the General Secretary by order of the Executive Committee.
15. No alteration of or addition to the rules shall be made without due notice or at any meeting other than the first meeting in April of each year, except by a vote of more than three-fourths of the members present at a meeting of not less than twenty-five members.

APPENDIX C

Membership & Executive Summary

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
|------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| | Cum Exec Years Consec. | Members' numbers official | Exec. Size | Turnover fm. prev. year | Turnover as % of tot. Exec. | Ave. yrs on Exec. | Total votes cast | % of mem' ship vot- ing | new mems elected official | mem's. out | London mem'ship | Univ'y mem'ship | Women members |
| 1884 | 3 | | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 1885 | 10 | | 7 | 0 | 0 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| 1886 | 15 | | 7 | 1 | 14 | 2 | | | | | | | |
| 1887 | 18 | | 7 | 2 | 29 | 3 | | | | | | | |
| 1888 | 20 | | 7 | 2 | 29 | 3 | | | | | | | |
| 1889 | 26 | | 7 | 0 | 0 | 4 | | | | | | | |
| 1890 | 34 | 173 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 2 | | | 57 | | 139 | | 49 |
| 1891 | 47 | 361 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 117 | 32 | | | 239 | | |
| 1892 | 56 | 541 | 15 | 4 | 27 | 4 | 152 | 28 | | 25 | 340 | | 117 |
| 1893 | 62 | 640 | 15 | 4 | 27 | 4 | 133 | 21 | | 71 | 399 | | |
| 1894 | 68 | 681 | 15 | 4 | 27 | 5 | 389 | 57 | 74 | 42 | 417 | | |
| 1895 | 86 | 699 | 15 | 4 | 27 | 6 | 336 | 46 | | 56 | 403 | | 151 |
| 1896 | 79 | 739 | 15 | 3 | 20 | 5 | 323 | 42 | 129 | 89 | 374 | 40 | |
| 1897 | 95 | 816 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 234 | 29 | 126 | 49 | 399 | 45 | 157 |
| 1898 | 101 | 835 | 15 | 3 | 20 | 7 | 306 | 36 | 73 | 54 | 396 | | 164 |
| 1899 | 108 | 861 | 15 | 2 | 13 | 7 | 288 | 33 | 74 | 48 | 402 | | |
| 1900 | 92 | 811 | 15 | 3 | 20 | 6 | | | 75 | 125 | 365 | | 164 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

APPENDIX C

APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Stephen J. O'Neil has been read and approved by the following committee:

Dr. Jo Hays, Director
Professor, History, Loyola

Dr. Franklin Walker
Professor, History, Loyola

Dr. Gerald Gutek
Professor, Education, Loyola

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Nov. 12, 1966
Date


Director's Signature